

川上 稔

イラスト：さとやす (TENKY)

GENESISシリーズ

境界線 上の ホライゾン II

下

installation



installation

■ "Scarred" ■

※ I doubt anyone will read this before reading the actual book, so this will include spoilers.

Of the two Marys that are Scarred's true identity, Mary Stuart has recently been reevaluated and Mary I is still viewed poorly.

This is due to the "Bloody" thing and her continued hatred of Anne Boleyn, who was the cause of her mother's divorce, and her half-sister Elizabeth.

It is also due to almost making England a vassal state of Catholic Spain in her marriage to Felipe II.

But even as a staunch Catholic, Mary I did not give England's throne to the Catholic nations and she handed the throne to her half-sister Elizabeth shortly before her death.

There was probably some scheming and obligation involved in that decision, but I think that Mary I was definitely an "English Queen".

In a way, she might be the greatest victor in regards to Elizabeth.

As a character who bears all that complexity, Scarred gained her scars as a Mary who worked for her own sake rather than a Mary who was a contrast to Elizabeth.

The scar on her face does not make her a contrast to her younger sister; it proves that she is a completely different person.

She generally wears an English uniform below the cloak, but she omits the scarf as a sign of her freedom. But as a form of internal discipline, she braids her hair.

And as a surprisingly active person, her normal outfit is reminiscent of a shirt and jeans.

I think she is the type to go out shopping while so defenseless it makes others worry.

(Kawakami Minoru)



Because——。

II

下

川上 稔

イラスト・さとやす (TENKY)

horizon

on the Middle
of Nowhere
episode.02





2

character

Name: Elizabeth

Faction: Oxford Academy

Position: Chancellor and
Student Council President

Style: Versatile Spirit Spell User

Special: Fairly Airheaded

Name: "Scarred"

Faction: England?

Position: Representative of
England's Fourth Level?

Style: Versatile Spirit Spell User

Special: Gentle Disposition

Weakened by the loss of the Hundred Year's War, England lost its opportunity to expand into Hexagone Française. After the Wars of the Roses over its own royal succession, they avoided interference from other nations and began applying pressure to the nobles and Tsrhc Catholics which allowed interference in. As they gained private funds, they paved the way to an absolute monarchy.

Through the Reformation, England created the Anglican Church and became an isolated nation that was not influenced by other nations. This policy was established in the age of Fairy Queen Elizabeth.

Very important

Name: Thomas Shakespeare

• “England” •

England is a floating island of non-humans located over the ocean north of Hexagone Française.

Thanks to the Celtic fairies and the ley line research carried out by the indigenous people, they have highly developed spells. After the destruction of Rome which temporarily conquered them, the nation achieved its current form during the age of King Arthur.

Important

But in 1066 southern England was invaded and conquered by the lords of Normandy on the northern coast of Hexagone Française. This is known as the Norman Conquest. After gaining and developing connections to the mainland, England became involved with the succession of the French throne and the Hundred Years' War began.



Name: Michizane



Oxford オクスフォードTRUMPS



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Tragedy of Oxford (Far Eastern Translation)



Hi, this is Cavendish, the most sensible of the Trumps and therefore the most often overlooked. Today's article is about a tragedy that occurred at Oxford Academy. The commentary will be provided by sharp-tongued O'Malley who was there at the time.



Could someone please tell those idiots that all-you-can-eat, festivals, banquets, and competitive eating are all different things? And you're not overlooked because you're sensible. It's because you always hole up in your ship as a mermaid.



This dryad's sharp tongue is far too indiscriminate! And I don't want to hear anything from the one who stops by my ship and eats all my snacks. A-anyway, feel free to leave a comment on the video.

Video Comments

"Oh, this is the video of me, isn't it? I sure ate a lot. It's best to leave no regrets in life."
"I think you left someone else with some pretty major regrets."
"H-huh? Why am I showing up in the background?"
"Mito-tsan, you're probably trying to look flustered, but I think you should show more restraint in your portions there."
"Eh? That's a perfectly normal amount!"
"What were you people doing while I was preparing for that meeting?"

極東史

Far Eastern History

A.I.A.D.U.S.T.

First of all

Mankind is emotional

And they try to act intellectual

Hopefully, viewing the history that results in will be of some help



II 〈B〉

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 Aoi Kimi Toori's older sister and worshipper of the god of eroticism and dancing. Fundamentally high-tensioned and selfish in practice.	 Aoi Toori Musashi Ariadust Academy's chancellor and student council president. Mr. Impossible.
 Asama Tomo Daughter of the Asama Shrine, Musashi's main shrine. Childhood friend and overall victim of Toori and Kimi.	 Azuma Child of the emperor and a half-god. All his abilities have been sealed and he lives on the Musashi.
 Adele Balfette From a vassal family that arrived from France. Glasses girl.	 Itou Kenji Cheerful incubus. Nude, bald, and muscular. Known as Itoken.
 Ohiroshiki Ginji Gourmet otaku with a Heart-sama style build.	 Kiyonari Urquiaga 2nd special duty officer. Flying half-dragon. Hopes to be an inquisitor. Known as Uqui.
 Shirojiro Bertoni Treasurer. Young leading member of Musashi's commerce and industry guild.	 Tenzou Crossunite 1st special duty officer. Ninja and errand-runner who always covers his face with his hat.
 Toussaint Neshinbara Secretary. Loves history, wants to be an author, and writes doujins.	 Naomasa 6th special duty officer. Older sister type who works in the engine division. Smokes and laughs loudly.
 Nate Mitotsudaira 5th special duty officer. Member of a knight family and inheritor of the Mito Matsudaira name. Half werewolf.	 Nenji Slime with about 3 HP. Manly.
 Noriki Laborer boy who supports his family. Clumsy martial artist. Silent and unsociable.	 Heidi Augesvarer Treasurer's aide. Shirojiro's partner. Has a white fox named Erimaki.
 Hassan Furubushi Calpis logo style Indian. Lives while eating and drinking only curry.	 Persona-kun Super macho man with a bucket helmet. Silent, strong, and kindhearted.
 Horizon Ariadust Toori's childhood friend and current ruler of Mikawa. Currently an automaton. Her emotions were taken as parts for the Logismoi Oplo.	 Honda Futayo Former Mikawa student. Honda Tadakatsu's daughter. Uses a strongly old-fashioned speech pattern.
 Honda Masazumi Vice president of the student council. Diligent exchange student who arrived from Mikawa the previous year. Has various issues with her family.	 Malga Naruze 4th special duty officer. Black-haired six-winged Weiss Hexen. Member of the manga club.
 Margot Naito 3rd special duty officer. Blonde-haired six-winged Schwarz Hexen. Always smiling.	Miriam Poqou Girl who stays in her room because she requires a wheelchair.
 Mukai Suzu Blind but always gives it her all. Acts as everyone's stopper.	

character

Academy Affiliates



Oriotorai Makiko

High-speed battling teacher. Always wears a track suit.



"Musashi"

Automaton that supervises the Musashi and overall commander. Her sharp comments are hard to put up with.

Sanyou Mitsuki

Class 3-Bamboo's homeroom teacher. Looks up to Oriotorai. Somewhat sensitive and unlucky.



Sakai Tadatsugu

Musashi Ariadust Academy's president. Used to be a very able person but was demoted.

Yoshinao

King of Musashi who was sent from Hexagone Française. Has a veto right toward the academy and has the authority to manage Musashi.

Tres España



Felipe Segundo

Chancellor and student council president. Hard-working middle-aged man.



Velázquez

Secretary. Long-lived. Painter and Testamenta Arma user. Middle-aged.



Tachibana Muneshige

Peerless in the West. Logismo Oplo "Lype Katathlipse" user. Tres España's 1st special duty officer. A fairly nice person and adopted into his family by marriage.



Tachibana Gin

3rd special duty officer. Tachibana Muneshige's wife and false arms girl.



Juana

Vice president of the student council. Female teacher type. Logismo Oplo user.



Hironaka Takakane

Vice chancellor. Ghost. Baseball team captain. Testamenta Arma user.



Era Fusae

2nd special duty officer. Long-lived. Ghost. Takakane's wife. Track team captain.



Valdés Siblings

4th and 5th special duty officers. Baseball team members.

England



Elizabeth

Chancellor and student council president. Fairy Queen. Ex. Caliburn user.



William Cecil

Vice president of the student council. Competitive eater and weight user.



Ben Jonson

Secretary. Black athlete poet. President of the literature club.



Charles Howard

Naval admiral. Wealthy common sense man. No combat ability.



Francis Drake

Hard Wolf and naval vice admiral. Testamenta Arma user.



Thomas Cavendish

Drake and the others' underclassman. Mermaid woman.



Christopher Hatton

Lord Chancellor and Living Bones.



Walter Raleigh

Far Easterner. Elizabeth's wartime advisor.

Mary

Elizabeth's elder half sister. Scheduled to be executed for attempting to assassinate the queen.



Robert Dudley

Vice chancellor. Thin woman. Testamenta Arma user.



Nicholas Bacon

Hammer user and trickster. Lord Keeper of the Great Seal of England.



Thomas Shakespeare

Logismo Oplo user. Half-lived race. Vice president of the literature club.



John Hawkins

Drake's companion. Swimsuit man.



Grace O'Malley

Female pirate of Scotland. Elizabeth's friend.



F. Walsingham

Automaton leader of the public morals committee. Spymaster.

Other

Innocentius

Pope-Chancellor. Leader of the Catholics and representative of K.P.A. Italia.

Oda Nobunaga

A name-inheritor appeared recently, but that inheritor has not appeared out of fear of Testament Union assassins.

F

- Fan Gang:** Qing brand. Durable but a bit rough.
- Far East:** Name of the Divine States after the Harmonic Unification War.
- Fino Alba:** K.P.A. Italian brand. Their use of springs is their selling point.

G

- God of War:** A giant humanoid machine that people combine with to move.
- Graduation:** No limit for nations other than the Far East. Far Easterners must graduate at 18.
- Grande y Felicísima Armada:** Tres España's fleet for the Armada battle. Made up of cutting-edge ships.

H

- Harmonic Territory:** Locations where the fallen Harmonic World Divine States unified with the real world while breaking apart.
- Harmonic Unification War:** A war between the harmonic world residents and the real world (Divine States) residents after the destruction of the harmonic world. The harmonic world residents won and began a provisional rule over the Divine States.
- Harmonic World:** A former alternate space that copied the Divine States. Preserved through ley line control.
- Hexagone Française:** Mouri clan + France.
- History Recreation:** Recreating the Testament descriptions to maintain the path the world takes.
- Holy Spells:** Tsrhc spells. The Catholics are related to the Testament and holy individuals while the Protestants derive power only from the Testament.

I

- Inherited Name:** The name of a historical figure given to an appropriate individual for the history recreation.
- Internal Blessings:** Blessings stored within oneself.
- IZUMO:** The Far East's largest corporation. The headquarters for Far Eastern shrines and the corporation that built the Musashi.

J

- Judge/Judgment:** Means "understood". Used by criminals.

K

- K.P.A. Italia:** Association of Aki States + Union of Italian City States.

L

- Ley line:** The thicker of the pathways through which ether flows.

A

- Academy:** An educational facility. Used as the center of political and military power. Tend to have many branch schools.
- Academy Rules:** The basic laws upheld between academies. Agreed to by the Testament Union.
- Amako clan:** Former IZUMO land. Destroyed by Mouri and Hexagone Française.
- Apocalypse:** The end of the world. 1648 when the Testament's history descriptions end.
- ArchsArt:** England's primary corporation.
- Armada battle:** A naval battle fought between England and Tres España. Tres España planned to land on England but their fleet was destroyed.
- ATELL:** The smallest unit of ether. Used for spells.

B

- Blessings:** The amount of ether needed for a human to exist for one hour. 3600 ATELL. Conversion unit for a spell's ATELL consumption.

C

- Catholic (Old Faith):** The old mainstream version of Tsrhc.
- Chancellor's Officers:** An organization led by the chancellor which leads the academy and performs work such as defense.
- Contradiction Allowance:** The foundational ability of the world. Allows the simultaneous existence of all sorts of physical laws.

D

- Divine States:** Former name of the Far East.
- Divine Weapon:** A weapon that, unlike a normal weapon, has a unique ability.

E

- EDEL Brocken (Overlooking Magic Mountain):** Magic brand. Location of headquarters unknown.
- Emperor:** A divine individual who is said to control the ley lines using the Imperial Regalia in Kyou. Does not interfere with the world.
- England:** Uses a floating island and does not control any Far Eastern land or Far Eastern daimyo.
- Ether:** Component that makes up contradiction allowing space.
- Ether Engine:** An engine that uses ether's space-altering ability. The effect changes based on the internal crest.
- Ether Fuel:** Ether that has been purified into fuel. Used as External Blessings or for ether engines.
- Ether Reactor:** A reactor that extracts and purifies ether from the air. Has a lower output than a ley line reactor, but is relatively safe.
- Excalibur:** Has a first and second version.
- External Blessings:** Blessings accumulated outside of oneself. Ether fuel is an example.

words

S

- San Mercado (Pure Metropolis):** Tres Español brand.
- Shinto:** Far Eastern religion. Worships the Far Eastern gods and uses divine music spells.
- Shirasago Enterprises:** IZUMO's shrine brand.
- Sign Frame:** Spell device needed to use each religion's basic protection.
- Song of Passage:** Prototype of a fairy tale created in the Far East during the Edo period.
- Spirit Spell:** Primitive spells used by talking to and borrowing the power of spirits, which are ether with a will of its own.
- Spell:** Causing a miracle in a certain space by processing ether.
- Student Council:** The organization that handles an academy's domestic and foreign affairs.
- Substitution:** Offering something to please a god instead of using Blessings to activate a spell.
- Sviet Rus:** Uesugi clan + Russia.

T

- Tes./Testament:** Means "understood".
- Testament:** A history book that provides the history of the earth's previous age. There are seven pairs and excerpts.
- Testament Descriptions:** History of the earth's previous age that is automatically updated by the Testament. However, it stopped updating after the description for 1648.
- Testament Union:** An organization meant to lead the history recreation.
- Testamenta Arma (Testament Public Weapons):** Weapons that use the ability of the Testaments.
- Tres España:** Oouchi and Ootomo clans + Spain. Currently includes Portugal.
- Tsirhc:** A religion which places the Son of God at the top. Worships the Testament.

W

- Wheel Formation:** A wheel-shaped formation. A high mobility formation that rotates a circular formation and has only the attackers in the proper position attack. The attack is performed in a high-speed rotation to raise attack speed and reduce losses.



- Ley line Reactor:** A reactor that extracts and refines either from ley lines. Can easily cause ley line mutations and destroy everything within several kilometers if they explode. Due to their instability, they are banned by the Tsirhc religion.
- Logismoi Oplo (Deadly Sin Weapons):** Weapons of mass destruction created on the motif of the seven deadly sins.

M

- Magic:** Folk spells currently under persecution in Europe.
- M.H.R.R.:** Hashiba clan + Holy Roman Empire.
- Mikawa:** Destroyed by the collapse of Lord Motonobu's ley line reactor.
- Mlasi:** A later non-Tsirhc religion that also worships the Testament.
- Mouse (Executive Tool):** A spirit beast device to act as an intermediary between the Shinto religion and its musicians. Other religions use different names.
- Musashi:** Aerial city ship. The sole independent territory allowed for the Far East.



- Musashi Ariadust Academy:** The Far East's representative academy which exists on Okutama of Musashi.
- Musician:** A religion's worshiper.

O

- Offering:** Providing a god with something they will enjoy or Internal Blessings.
- Orei Metallo/Water:** Ore or water containing ether. Can be used as ether fuel.

P

- P.A.ODA:** Oda clan + Osman (Ottomans).
- Peace of Westphalia:** The peace treaty that ended the Thirty Years' War.
- Protestant (New Faith):** A new style of Tsirhc created to escape the corruption of Catholicism and to adjust to the new age.
- Provisional Council:** Group of adults who act as bureaucrats toward Musashi's student council, chancellor's officers, and student committees.

Q

- Qing:** China.

CHAPTER 32

"Man and Woman in the Plaza"



What are the possibilities
Produced by the circumstances
Of this pair?

Point Allocation (Up Down)

What are the possibilities

Produced by the circumstances

Of this pair?

Point Allocation (Up Down)

The sky reached the end of midday and entered the afternoon.

While watching the noisy crowds, a ninja walked through the stone streets with a girl.

He wore a Far Eastern uniform as a ninja outfit and the girl wore a white shirt with an inner suit that resembled jeans.

Her skin was covered in scars. The large one running from above her nose to her left cheek was the most noticeable, but several other glossy scars were visible on her wrists, hands, and the part of her chest visible through her shirt's collar.

Nevertheless, she smiled and let the sunlight wash over her body and blonde hair.

“Master Tenzou, how about some fried haddock and apples for lunch? That stand over there has some fried fish prepared so we can eat it as we walk.”

“Actually, Scarred-dono, I will buy it. The yen is a common currency.”

“But can you speak enough English to buy it?”

After a moment of thought, Tenzou hung his head.

“...I'm not really hungry.”

“That would make our trip to the festival meaningless.”

With a slight smile, Scarred walked lightly over to the festival stand.

“Not good. It’s like I’m trying to be unpopular,” commented Tenzou after being left alone.

Having the girl pay for me might be even worse than splitting the bill, he worried, but then he glanced at her back as she quickly made an order and waited for it to finish.

...I’m glad I came.

Tenzou recalled what had happened less than half an hour ago.

After finishing their work in the field, she had gone off to change but returned in her usual cloak and hood. He had assumed she was self-conscious about the scars on her face, but then they had arrived near the carriage station.

“Excuse me a moment,” she had said.

To his surprise, she had suddenly removed the cloak.

He had seen the white of her light shirt and the color of the inner suit covering her legs.

“This deep sky blue is popular in Genova of K.P.A. Italia, so it is known as Genova blue.”

He had been unsure how to react when she showed him her legs, but she had gone on to fix her braid and place a white water lily in her hair.

“What do you think?”

He had been left with no choice but to give an answer, so he had focused on the simple color scheme of white, blue, and the gold of her hair.

...But calling her “clean” would be strange.

He had gone back and forth between several different descriptions because he had felt they all fit her, but he had finally summed them all up in one statement.

“It suits you very well, Scarred-dono.”

Her eyebrows had risen for just an instant, but she had formed a smile a moment later.

“Thank you very much.”

He had not known why she was thanking him, but he figured he had not said anything wrong. After they had entered London, her excitement had remained steadily high. She seemed to know the area well because she not only knew about the buildings around but she had been able to tell him the origins of streets and the reason certain trees lined the streets. She had also informed him how the culture and civilization enveloped the city.

“Um, you see the flowers decorating some of the doors to houses? Those are from the Celtic spring festival of Beltane. In Europe, May 1 is known as May Day, but England mixes in Celtic traditions and the May Bircher leaves flowers at people’s doorstep like that.”

“Are they still there because they are seen as a sort of protective charm?”

“Unfortunately, that is because of the trouble with Tres España.”

Tenzou had lowered his head slightly at her reluctant comment, but she had replied with a smile and said that spring would arrive soon enough.

As their conversation had continued, he had realized something.

...This is who she really is.

She smiled and she spoke. She may have done both of those before, but he had simply overlooked it because she was hidden by the hood.

“Here.”

In the present, she returned and held out a bundle of old paper wrapped like a bouquet.

As Tenzou took the bundle of paper, she smiled bitterly.

“This is for both of us. It’s actually meant for one, but I don’t eat very much. And if I brought two separate servings, you would have insisted on paying me back later.”

...Sh-she hit the mark so closely I can’t argue at all!

At any rate, the paper was stained with grease, so he opted to hold it for the two of them. She said it was proper to grab pieces while walking, so he did so.

“There is quite a bit in here.”

“I ordered a half, so this is half of a haddock. In England, this is not considered very much. We don’t have much bread and the like, so we primarily eat fish, other meats, fruits, and vegetables. Oh, and here are the apples.”

“I see they are fried.”

The apples had been wrapped in a wheat breading and fried, so they somewhat resembled tempura.

“The breading is made by mixing beaten egg whites with flour and spreading it with milk. You could call it a fried pie.”

Tenzou knew from his few days in England that they were known as fritters. He remembered eating them for snacks during past stops at England and other places.

“Do you eat so many fried foods because of the lack of wheat?”

“What we farm is stored as flour. We normally make scones so it will expand as much as possible or make foods like this to efficiently use what little we have.

Also, you used to have to pay your feudal lord to use the oven to bake bread, so people would fry things at home instead of using the oven. In the same way, it is dangerous to use an oven on a ship.”

Tenzou nodded and realized there was a lot one did not understand until actually living somewhere.

He grabbed a stick of fried fish and felt the salt and vinegar permeating his tongue. The apple fritter’s breading smelled nice and the inside was melted and sweet, but the flavor of the fried breading changed in places which made each bite interesting.

As he realized how much he was enjoying himself, he had a sudden question.

“Scarred-dono,” he began. “Is it just me or is there a surprising lack of people at this festival?”

...How very strange.

There was no one on the streets or the plazas. There were stands and people along the arcades, but it seemed the number of stands lowered the closer to the city center they went.

...But I can hear the music and cheers of a festival coming from somewhere.

Tenzou began to wonder if the festival was moving.

“Later, can we stop by the doujinshi sale being held at a warehouse near Covent Garden? I know Neshinbara-dono will be there.”

“Judge.”

The way she answered while weakly looking toward the ground made Tenzou feel oddly worried. He wondered if he had said anything wrong, but she gave him a smile before he could say anything more.

“What is a doujinshi?”

...Oh, no!!

He used the term so often in his everyday life that he had assumed she knew what it meant. This could be described as a type of Musashi disease. A sticky sweat covered him as he realized he had to explain it somehow but also knew any explanation would sound like a pathetic excuse. Even so, he gathered up his strength and started.

“A doujinshi-...”

Just as he started, he heard a high-pitched noise in the distance. It was quiet yet distinct and he recognized it because he had heard it many times before.

“Metal... That was the sound of a sword’s guard or something similar being deflected.”

“Judge. Perhaps they are having a play for the festival. I am a bit curious too, but there is somewhere I would like to take you first.”

The white water lily and her hair shook as she nodded.

“Master Tenzou, there is something I wish to show you and this festival is likely my last chance.”

She began walking north. That was the same direction as the sounds of sword fighting and the direction of Oxford and the Tower of London.

Two figures faced each other on a grassy area.

The male and female warriors were in Oxford Academy’s large courtyard and they both held weapons. The girl held a spear and the man held a giant sword hilt over his right shoulder and lightly shook the left hand near his chest.

The former was Honda Futayo and the latter was Trumps “1” Walter Raleigh.

A hilt lay at Walter's feet. It was a sword hilt, but it had no blade. Several identical white hilts were attached to the belts on his uniform's shoulders and waist. One of those was dropped at his feet.

Meanwhile, Futayo held Tonbokiri low and watched his swaying left hand.

...What a troublesome way of keeping tempo.

Walter's techniques were based in iai and, at least for the time being, his weapons were the blade-less hilts attached to his uniform.

Futayo knew exactly what those bladeless hilts were. Mikawa had been one of the places in which those weapons were produced, so she had seen the prototypes.

...I believe Ii-sama made them.

They were gravity swords.

When the hilt's cap was removed, the safety was removed from the device inside the hilt and a pair of repelling gravity bands would be ejected as a thin board. The pair of gravity bands would pull things outwards.

...So anything the blade hits is ripped apart by the two gravitational pulls.

Ii had said the trick was seeing how narrow the gap between the gravity bands could be made. Futayo recalled her conversation with him.

"How narrow can you make it?" she had asked.

"If we narrowed it down to the monomolecular level, the Testament Union might get mad."

"The monomolecular level? How narrow is that? As narrow as my fingertip?"

"No, that would be even narrower than your fingernail."

Li had pressed his fingertip against it without thinking, spewed blood everywhere, and had to sterilize the entire workshop, so it was a good memory. *Memories of the deceased are always lovely*, she thought while casting her gaze down.

The hilt on the ground had been knocked there by her.

...But it was surprisingly light.

What a pain, she muttered in her heart.

She had been taught about iai more by Kazuno than her father, but the focus on speed in her fighting style posed a problem.

...This is a poor matchup.

Futayo viewed it as an issue of compatibility.

After all, one did not move with iai. One would focus on the range of their sword and send out a high-speed strike as soon as the enemy entered into range. It was a waiting game.

For her to move in and attack was to charge right into the enemy's attack.

"This is troublesome."

She moved a half step to the right. Walter stood in a sideways stance, so that direction brought her toward his back.

But he raised the toes of his left foot and pointed them toward her. He then slid his right heel to face her with the smallest possible motion.

He viewed himself as the center of a circle and would always keep himself facing her.

...He is acting like a turret.

He would maintain the optimal attack position and constantly face her.

The difficulty this made her feel was his intention. She had knocked his hilt to the ground in a light exchange earlier.

...But he was targeting my Tonbokiri.

When she had seen through his intentions and attacked, he had released the gravity sword hilt and escaped.

He was not afraid to lose his gravity sword. He had drawn back without the slightest hesitation. If he had, Tonbokiri would have cut off his hand or at least grazed him.

After analyzing the situation, Futayo thought.

...He is an expert at handling an enemy with a spear in single combat.

Not many people would regularly wield a spear as a personal weapon.

After all, a spear was intended for a large area like a battlefield.

It was a powerful weapon, but it was heavy and unwieldy.

That was why most warriors used swords instead, but that would also mean they were not accustomed to opposing an enemy with a spear.

However, Walter was different. He used a sword with iai techniques, but once he had seen he could not fully stop her previous attack, he had caught it on the guard, dropped the hilt, and drawn his hand back.

It was the correct method for handling an opponent with a spear and he would have needed training and actual battle experience to gain that sort of skill.

Futayo began imagining what situation would be needed for him to obtain the training to so accurately oppose a spear in single combat.

...That would be...

She began thinking and so she held her right palm toward Walter and spoke.

“Thinking time.”

Futayo saw Walter’s mouth open in surprise, but she did not mind. This was a rule her father had often used. He had told her that attacking someone during thinking time was a cowardly act.

...I believe he received a lecture from Kazuno-sama behind the house afterwards, but my father would never lie. This must be common knowledge among Far Eastern warriors. I am leaving no openings.

Having declared thinking time, Futayo placed a hand on her chin and thought about Walter’s possible origins.

...What situation would let him wield a sword and face an opponent wielding a spear, a weapon meant for a large battlefield?

She could think of only one possibility.

...Retreating from a losing battle?

He could have lost a battle and lost all weapons but a sword, and yet had the enemy continued pursuit in the hopes of being honored for fighting so valiantly.

In the history recreation of the Far East, that situation was still quite common.

But a question remained in Futayo’s mind. How many battles would he have to live through to put together iai techniques against spears? And where would he have experienced those battlefields?

“The Amako clan. I mentioned it earlier, didn’t I?”

Walter remained silent, so she continued speaking in order to gather her thoughts.

“The Amako clan had a group known as the Amako Ten Braves who continued working to revive the destroyed clan. The Oda clan had been assisting them, but Oda followed the history recreation and treated them as expendable without providing any chance for direct negotiation. Seven of the ten died and one went missing, but two continued resisting until the very end. One was Yokomichi Masamitsu. And the other...”

The other was...

“Yamanaka Yukimori. Or Yamanaka Shikasuke as he was also known.”

Futayo spoke questioningly to the man before her.

“He caused several battles with small armies and escaped through the castle sewage when he was captured. He sounds more like a ninja than a warrior.”

She knew that a ninja’s primary weapon was the sword and they would only use the initial strike before fleeing.

The man before her was the same.

She then recalled what her father had told her about Yamanaka Yukimori’s battle history.

During the days of the Amako clan, he had thrice won in single combat against enemy generals. After the fall of Amako, he had successfully taken castles several times and had cut down several enemy commanders.

His Urban Name had been the Genius in the Shade of the Mountain.

With all that in mind, Futayo spoke.

“You are known as ‘Trident’ Walter Raleigh. I had wondered why a sword-user would be known as the Trident, but it seems to be a play on words. The three prongs of the character for ‘Yama’ and the straight line of the character for ‘Naka’ form a trident. According to the history recreation, you were assassinated

because you could not be killed on the battlefield, but it appears you survived and moved to a foreign land.”

Walter did not reply, but Futayo looked up and stared at the face hidden by his bangs.

“Did you find something here that is of equal value to the clan you were willing to risk your life for?”

Walter still gave no answer.

Futayo did not know if that silence was affirmation or denial, but she had a thought.

...That's right.

Yamanaka Yukimori had a famous quote. When he had sworn to restore his master's clan, he had looked up at the crescent moon and said these words.

“I pray that you give me many hardships.”

If one took the crescent moon in hand as a blade, a curve of darkness would remain in the sky.

...Is that the source of his insistence on using gravity swords?

Futayo took a deep breath.

...I'm glad I traveled out into the world.

She had never expected to meet someone like this in a foreign land. If her father were still around, she could brag about it. She could almost hear him saying “I-I'm not jealous at all! At all!” with his voice growing high-pitched toward the end.

...Now that I think about it, that was probably a joke he created along with Sakai-sama and the others.

At any rate, she felt a Far Eastern warrior should stick to his or her own style while in a foreign land. She had no way of knowing the truth of the Age of the Gods, but she knew what the truth was to her now.

...I have found something here that will bring me to a new world!

She had not abandoned herself. While thinking about what that meant, she spoke.

“Thinking time has come to an end and I will now face you as Honda Tadakatsu’s daughter, Honda Futayo.”

But despite all her thinking, one fact remained: this was a troublesome opponent.

And that troublesome side of him was no deception. This was the ability that had supported a nation, so she began thinking once more.

How was she supposed to handle an opponent who used the unmoving techniques of iai?

She thought and thought and finally reached an answer.

“Bind, Tonbokiri!”

From a distance of eight meters, she used the cutting power that did not require she approach.

Futayo used the projectile cutting power against the “waiting” of Walter’s iai. She did not think of this as unfair. If that was unfair, then the “waiting” of iai would be unfair against normal swordplay.

And more importantly, there was a tactical gap between projectiles and “waiting”.

...More often than not, the projectile won’t get through!

And so she stepped forward while firing the cutting power.

In iai, it all came down to a single strike. But when that single strike was made, both sides had to pour in every method available to them.

And so Futayo moved. She fired the cutting power in a horizontal line so it would be difficult to evade and she circled around to the right which took her to his back.

However, something strange happened before her eyes.

...Tonbokiri's cutting power vanished!?

She took a few steps forward while wondering what had happened and she saw the source of her question as she accelerated.

There was a distortion.

Tonbokiri cut its target by gathering the name of the target reflected in its blade.

But she saw a distortion around Walter's chest in his reflection on the blade.

It looked like a thick shimmering. The light was being bent in odd directions.

“Is that the pair of gravity bands from the gravity sword!?”

...Can that gravity sword spread the output of its gravity bands outward!?

That was his defense against optical weapons and projectiles.

However, he had been forced to swing his left arm in an initial iai strike. Before he could launch a second strike, he would need to fix his posture and return his left arm to its original position.

If Futayo could close the distance in that time, she would win.

She faced straight forward as she ran. She stared at Walter past the shimmering and she prepared to use Tonbokiri to knock the gravity sword up and to the right.

As she watched, Walter moved, but he had not fixed his posture yet.

He used his left arm to continued swinging the blade around and to his back while he also rotated toward Futayo.

...It can't be.

She understood what he was about to do. He would rotate to the left using the momentum of his left iai strike.

...And then he will use the large gravity sword on his right shoulder!

The instant she realized it, Walter performed a tornado rotation.

He rotated his upper body first to accelerate and then the rest of his body spun around. As she charged in, he swung the large raised gravity sword at high speed.

White mist drew a diagonal arc through the air.

Futayo saw the invisible blade slice through the air and leave a white trail behind it.

Its range was six meters.

The high-speed attack arrived from diagonally up and to the left. She could attempt to jump to the right, but her forward acceleration would prevent her from gaining enough distance. If her ankle or shin were cut, it was all over.

She finally realized that his iai worked as a perfect countermeasure for a spear or gun.

The left iai was for defense or to cut the spear's shaft. Then his opponent would be forced to attack or defend.

The large gravity sword on the right allowed him to intercept a spear at a decent range.

...Based on the range of that large sword, he developed this in order to kill several enemies all at once!

When he had been in the Far East, no gravity swords like that had existed there. After arriving in England, he must have trained in defeating large groups in large spaces to add to his experience in defeating individuals while retreating.

This shift in tactics meant one thing.

...There is someone here in England who he must do all this to serve!

Futayo had not seen the Fairy Queen Elizabeth over the past few days. Howard and Jonson had come for the initial greeting, but Dudley and Cecil had not shown themselves.

She understood why the queen and the others had been absent. They had been planning this the entire time.

In that case, thought Futayo. It is the vice chancellor's duty to overcome this danger.

And so...

“...!”

She moved toward the sword swinging down from her left.

She intended to reach her opponent before the gravity sword's blade reached her.

But her acceleration could not match the heavy and accelerated instantaneous strike.

Also, her acceleration spell was the cumulative type. It was a slow starter, so its initial speed was weak.

“This is enough!”

She fired Tonbokiri.

She hit the switch for its extension device and sent the tip toward Walter.

Tonbokiri was normally about two meters long, but the six parts making up the shaft could extend as far as approximately six meters. That was just as long as Walter's gravity sword that he had prepared for fighting spears.

The fact that she was in range of his gravity sword meant one thing.

...The end of the spear can reach him if I extend it to six meters!

Her own speed as she ran was added to the extending spear as it flew toward him.

“Reach!”

But she saw him jump up lightly with both legs.

This was not a jump to bring him into the air. It instead brought the twisting of his body to its limit.

...That jump adds to his rotation speed!

The rotation of the large gravity sword was launched around like a top.

“...!”

As his giant iai strike was given even more speed, Futayo made an instantaneous decision.

As soon as she realized Tonbokiri would not make it before his rotating blade, she adjusted her grip on the extending spear as if to pull it back.

The extension process now sent Tonbokiri both forward and backward. As the blade extended toward Walter, the butt end extended away, but what if she grabbed farther up toward the tip and tilted it so that butt end was pointed toward the ground?

...The back end will gouge into the ground and the extension process will send me forward into the air!

If she used that momentum to jump...

“I will arrive overhead!”

And she did just that.

Walter looked up at the female warrior who circled overhead in an instant.

While charging, she had used her spear's mechanism to leap high into the sky. He had seen the instantaneous decision that had led her there, and it brought a single thought to his mind.

...Interesting.

He was still rotating, but the female warrior spun in midair and held the front end of her spear's shaft under her arm in order to target him. She then launched the butt end of the spear toward him.

This attack from midair was unavoidable and she would likely use the recoil of the impact to leap yet again.

But Walter made a single decision.

Anyone in Trumps could accomplish an equivalent attack.

And so he took action.

He used his accumulated experience to take the action necessary to cut his way to victory.

Futayo saw what Walter decided to do.

While rotating, he had twisted his body rather than evading.

“Is he trying to catch my attack with his left arm!?”

He was trying to wrap his arm around this high-speed strike so he could stop it barehanded.

She felt this was reckless, but based on his identity, she was certain he could manage it.

And what would happen if he did catch the butt end of her spear?

...While I am stopped, he will attack with the large gravity sword in his right arm!

On the other hand, if she let go of Tonbokiri, he would not hesitate to cut the spear to pieces.

But, she thought in her heart.

Tonbokiri was a famous spear and a memento of her father.

...But my father would not want for me to die. Yes.

She always tried to view things in a positive light. If she apologized to Tonbokiri, that would settle the problem, but she could not apologize to herself if it was her own life that was lost. *That leaves only one option*, she thought, but Tonbokiri protested.

“Have mercy.”

If the spear was going to be that insistent, she had no choice but to find a different solution, so she forcibly swung her body. She more or less embraced the spear's shaft, twisted her entire body around, and altered the spear's trajectory.

She wanted to divert it toward Walter's face, but his left hand could still reach it, so she chose a different target.

“The hilt of the large gravity sword!!”

Her actions resulted in destruction.

From Walter’s perspective, the attack came from diagonally up and to the left, so the bottom of the spear struck the large gravity sword’s hilt.

The blow was not exactly heavy, but it was also not exactly light either.

However, Walter’s strike veered off course once the balance of his iai was thrown off.

“...!”

The trajectory of the gravity sword bent and it cut into the ground.

Rather than gouging into the ground, it sank in and sliced through the earth like it was made of butter.

Dirt flew into the air and the courtyard ground exploded.

The sound was damp, heavy, and repeating.

Futayo rotated her body while embracing Tonbokiri and searched for a location to land.

The torn area of ground spread out in a ten meter fan shape. The effects of the large gravity sword had left the area soft enough that her feet would sink in when she landed, so she shrank down in midair to gain more flight distance.

“...Toh!”

And she landed beyond the area of torn earth.

She took a step back while standing and looked beyond the ten meters of destruction.

...Walter Raleigh.

But he was no longer in a battle pose. She wondered what was going on, but then she saw him face her and suddenly lower his head.

He bowed.

“...What?”

As soon as Futayo questioned his sudden bow, he faced the main entrance and vanished an instant later.

“...!?”

She initially thought an attack was coming.

...His presence is growing more distant?

But the slight motion of the wind produced by his presence was gone.

All that remained was the stench of dirt produced by the torn and exposed dirt.

“Has he left?”

The grass blowing in the wind seemed to be her answer.

“But...why?”

She checked the area to make sure he had left, but she noticed something in the spot he had been standing in a moment earlier.

She saw the glowing remnants of something. A panel of light was vanishing at the same height as his face.

...The lingering light of a sign frame?

The sign frame in front of Futayo was a Protestant one.

That meant someone had contacted Walter.

...Has he left this battlefield?

She found it hard to believe. A battle was fought to achieve an objective, so a significant reason was needed to abandon it.

But she then recalled why she assumed Walter was here in England.

“He found something here that is of equal value to his former master’s clan.”

She began hearing noises around her. People had heard the commotion and destruction in the courtyard, so they were rushing out to see what had happened.

While wondering what excuse she could make, Futayo rushed over to the remnants of the sign frame floating in the air. She could just barely make out the name of the one who had sent the divine message.

“Yokomichi Masamitsu.”

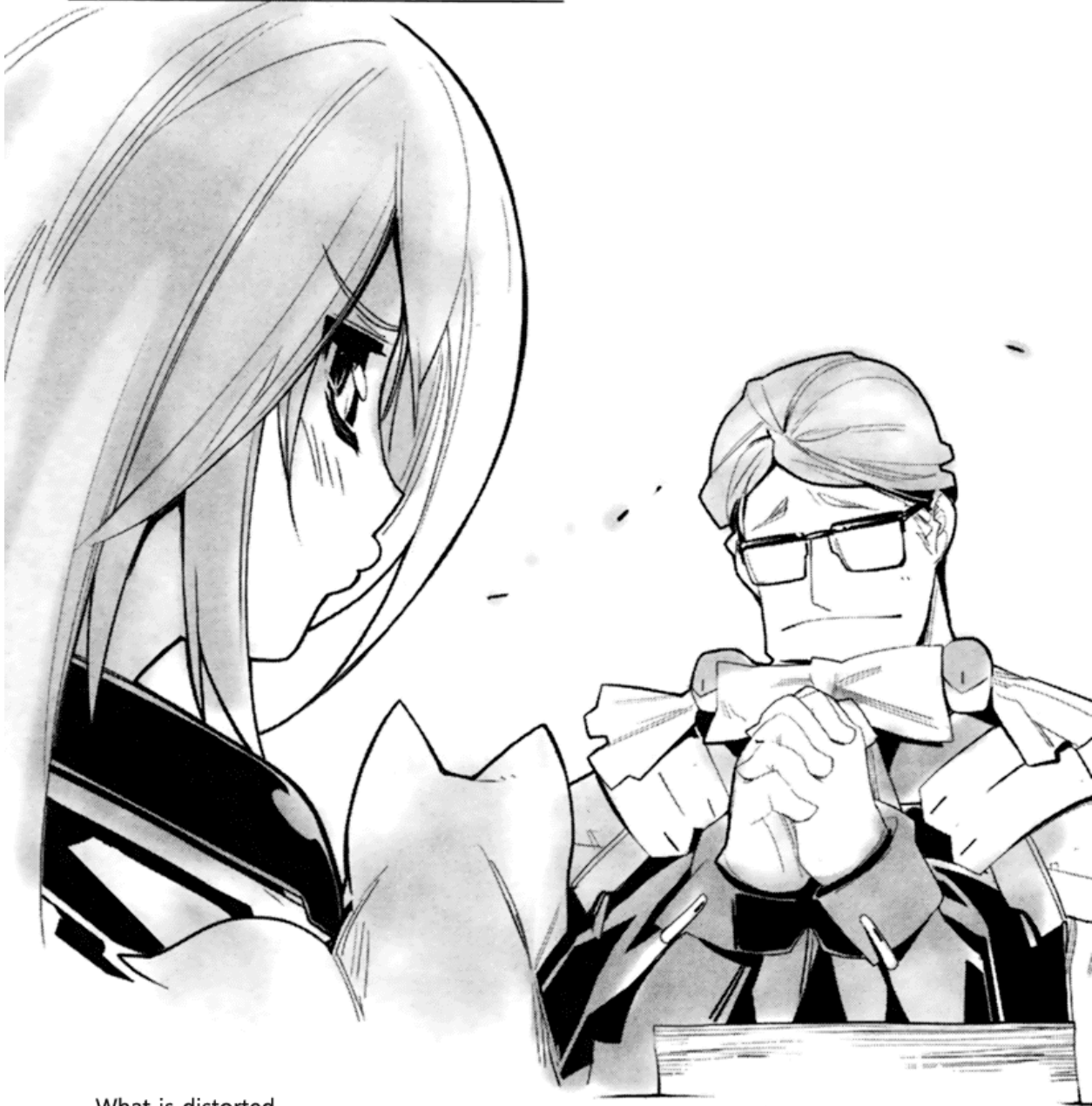
She recognized that name.

“That is a survivor of the Amako Ten Braves who went missing.”

Chapter 33: One who Lies on the Road

CHAPTER 33

"One who Lies on the Road"



What is distorted
Simply by sleeping
Point Allocation (Recovery)

What is distorted

Simply by sleeping

Point Allocation (Recovery)

A wooden terrace overlooked a major street with a sign saying Greater London City. The terrace was located on the second story of an arcade.

The location was difficult to see from below and three figures were surrounded by decorative plants. In the center was a table with a blackboard and fisherman's flag next to it.

The flag said "Howard's Shop" on it and three people sat around the table. One was a man in a male English uniform and the other two were a boy and girl in Far Eastern uniforms. The tall boy on the Far Eastern side snapped his fingers toward his partner to his left.

"Heidi, provide Lord Howard with the paperwork for this 'festival stand'."

"Judge. Lord Howard, this is Shirojiro Bertoni's final confirmation for our trade with England. Please send a copy to your committee office, industrial committee, and port administration office."

Heidi lightly tapped the white fox on her shoulder.

"Erimaki, please assist in the data processing."

As if that was his cue, Shirojiro spoke to Howard.

"Would you be willing to explain this situation, Lord Howard? Why is England holding these duels?"

"Testament."

Heidi heard Howard's assent.

...He isn't denying that the duels are taking place.

They were currently unable to contact Musashi's main forces. Being unable to contact Mukai or the rest of the diplomatic team was clearly out of the ordinary, yet England had said nothing about the matter.

There was no response from divine mail or divine chat either. Heidi and Shirojiro had initially suspected they had been trapped in some form of barrier, but their attempts to use England's cross religion divine transmission services for map and weather information had received responses with the proper seals attached.

That meant they were safe, but the others were in danger. It was best to assume the others had all been caught up in some form of trouble and had been trapped in a space that cut them off from contact.

...I hope they aren't causing trouble for England.

If the others went on a rampage and caused too much damage, it was usually the merchants like Heidi and Shirojiro who were forced to clean up because "anything can be resolved with money".

As Heidi was hoping it did not come to that, Howard placed the provided documents next to him.

"I am sure you have various guesses as to our reasons: an excuse for the Testament Union, to make our way to your chancellor, and so on. And we do indeed have a variety of reasons," he said. "But how about we continue with our deal?"

"You do not intend to battle us?"

"I am the slow and steady type and my physical strength and spell ability are both at or below that of your average person. All I can do is assist in the creation of the stage."

Howard pushed up his glasses and placed the pile of documents in the center of the table. The pile was about ten centimeters thick and he pushed it toward the two Far Easterners.

“I will be buying time. After all, all of those chosen this time are on the level of an academy’s special duty officers, so they do not quite have the right to challenge your chancellor. But you two treasurers and your vice chancellor would certainly take action at a time like this.”

“So you are keeping me here so that I cannot take part in the duels?” asked Shirojiro.

Howard nodded.

“By using money as an intermediary substitution, you might be able to interfere with the theatre space Shakespeare has created. On top of that, we do not want you borrowing the power of money to battle on the level of a god of war. That is why I will hold you here. In the same way, your secretary will be kept away by Shakespeare and your vice chancellor will be kept away on the first level. That leaves only your special duty officers.”

Heidi understood what Howard was saying.

“Even if they achieve something, you can say it means nothing on a higher level due to it occurring on the special duty officer level. It gives you an excuse.”

...Then what is Howard truly after here?

“Are you saying this is only an event for the festival? Is it a preliminary confrontation leading to the meeting this evening?”

“Testament. Whatever the result, our Fairy Queen will hold a meeting with you. That is what we are truly focused on, but we need to oppose you at the moment so the Testament Union cannot complain about the result of that meeting. ...And a decent result here would be a wonderful thing for England.”

“I see,” said Shirojiro as he adjusted his sitting position. “An excellent negotiation. Had you planned all this back when we negotiated on the transport ship?”

“Yes, but I did not expect you to drive eight days up to twelve. On the financial front, it was Musashi’s victory, but on the political front, it was England’s victory. And now that the stage is set, I can only wait for the others to guide us to that victory.”

Howard shrugged and further pushed the documents between them.

“Now then. Let us begin checking over the documents and affixing our seals. Oh, but I have plenty more prepared here, so there is no need to rush. I have added in some clauses that will be incredibly profitable for England, so make sure to check over it all very carefully,” he said. “Now, please accompany me as I make up for my inability to fight by stalling for time”

On the west side of London was a residential district near Westminster.

Something soared through the early afternoon light in the canyon between the tall buildings.

It was a roar produced from a beast’s maw and fangs.

“Grr...!”

It built up.

“Rluah!!”

The instant it was released, the surface of the road exploded. The ivy covering the outside of the stone buildings was blown away, the shutters were knocked away, and the straw on the roofs shook and scattered. The surface of the road was washed clean as if a thin layer was peeled up, but a Hard Wolf remained on the road and something remained in the sky.

“ ... ”

A fallen angel used its six black wings to soar. She performed a midair flip and landed on top of a three story building.

The tips of Naruze's toes landed on the straw-thatched roof, she absorbed the shock with her knees, and she looked down.

The Hard Wolf named Drake stood in the center of the road about thirty meters away.

However...

“What do you think of my War Cry, chicken girl?”

“It's quite something as far as howls go.”

That settles it, thought Naruze. He has pure blood even for a Hard Wolf.

When Norse warriors and Vikings battled, they would express their exaltation with a War Cry to receive the divine protection of their war god, but that was modeled after the War Cry of a pack of wolves pursuing their prey.

That howl was meant to frighten their prey and coordinate with their pack, but a Hard Wolf took it even further.

“It isn't as powerful as a Dragon Breath, but I can still knock down fleeing pray and put them in a state of shock. You often hear about animals cowering before a beast or a weaker beast giving up and offering itself to the wolf, right? Most of that comes down to this attack using our War Cry.”

He held up the gauntlet on his right hand to show it to her on the roof.

“If possible, I want you to show me how to negate this thing. How about it? Can you ignore this and actually attack me, chicken?”

Naruze did not understand what he meant. After all, he wore the Testamenta Arma that caused her to fail. With that on, he was invincible.

“Why do you want that? What’s wrong with being invincible?”

“Invincible?” he said.

Naruze took a defensive stance, but he did not do anything that suggested a denial or affirmation.

“The Testamenta Arma borrow the power of their nation’s Testament, so they stop working when they leave their nation’s ley lines. But I primarily fight in the skies outside of England, so this thing is almost entirely meaningless. Are you telling me to never leave England?”

When she thought about that question, she understood most of what he was trying to say.

“You want to reject that and say you don’t need it, don’t you? If you could find a way to make it useless, you would have no reason to keep it, you could leave this nation, and you could freely fight as a privateer in distant skies.”

“Testament. Our queen gave me this as a personal present, so I can’t just get rid of it for no reason.”

And...

“With this, my wife can’t stab me. I always end up doing the eating. Even when it’s her turn, it’s my turn. It makes me feel lonely.”

Drake held up the gauntlet and narrowed his eyes.

“I can’t tell if I’m really the most important person to her. She can’t even tell whether I’m so important to her that she won’t kill me or if I’m so important to her that she wants to kill me. ...And do you have any idea how much I have to eat and hurt her to satisfy a murderer who can’t kill the person closest to her? Not being able to kill others makes her want to hurt herself, so she’s desperate for twice the tragedy. She keeps telling me to give her more and more reasons to scream. By the end of it, it’s impossible to tell which one of us is doing the screaming.”

“Judge. So you’re giving 200% to ensure your marriage goes well?”

“Testament. I’m the type that will eat anything you serve me. But setting aside who the winner is, I just want you to hurt me. If you do, then I’ll have a much happier life. Personally, I would like to eat you, but I’d rather not kill you. So do your best so I don’t have to make that decision.”

“You keep saying you want to eat me. Do you really like chicken or something?”

“I do, but that’s not the issue here,” he said. “You’re similar to my wife in some respects. You’re both the type who remain devoted even if it means harming yourself.”

“ ... ”

“So...” Drake stepped forward. “If you can hurt me, so can she.”

“Being used as a replacement for another woman is what woman hate second most.”

“And what do they hate the most?”

“Being unable to obtain what they love, but being unable to give up on it either.”

“Testament.”

Drake smiled bitterly and continued his approach, but Naruze thought as he did so. She thought about how she could attack this opponent.

Whenever Naruze tried to attack, she would fail.

But so far, she had been able to evade. That told her something about the range of Drake’s Brachium Justitia’s effects.

...If I try to disgrace England’s justice, I will fail. But...

Any disgracing action would surely fail, so it was a defense-oriented Testamenta Arma. On top of that...

“Hard Wolves can only be harmed by weapons made of silver or something consecrated.”

“Testament. It’s a pretty common idea, but it makes me pretty hard to deal with.”

“Judge,” replied Naruze as she thought.

If a consecrated weapon would work, then a spell or weapon strengthened by ether would also work.

...The only weapons I have are the knives and forks from that café and my portable sewing kit.

She always carried that simple sewing kit and it had a single sewing needle and a single dressmaking pin. The utensils, pin, and needle were only silver plated, but it was better than nothing. They were enough to act as a medium for a spell.

She could also use the spells stored in her pen. She could not use the attack spells, but the drawing, divine transmission, and everyday life ones would work.

...I can use my lamp spell or the bodily reinforcements.

The lamp spell would illuminate the area around her and the bodily reinforcement spells would strengthen her muscles and nerves as well as reduce her exhaustion and increase her metabolism. Those spells were necessary to achieve proper mobility when flying, but she would also use them when busy working on the Musashi or when she slept. She would also create charms with them and sell them.

“They can all be used with internal *auspuff*. In that case...”

She understood how to combine all those things, she knew her and her opponents idiosyncrasies, and she knew when to attack and when to pull back.

“I have no choice but to go for it.”

“Let’s go,” Naruze muttered under her breath.

...If I don’t do this right, Margot will worry.

During the four days of preparation for the festival, Margot had not returned from the transport ship, so Naruze had often brought her changes of clothes and other personal items.

They shared a closet, but their cosmetics were separate due to their different skin tones, hair colors, and tastes. The lists of what Naito needed had been a surprise to Naruze. The other girl clearly paid more attention to her hair than Naruze did.

...Even if I can help restore her normal life by bringing her things, my failure doesn’t just go away.

In the Battle of Mikawa, Weiss Fräulein’s Verstärken Schale had been destroyed, so she had put a great burden on Naito and made her worry. Naito had been handling almost all of the actual work for their transport business.

...I showed her how useless I am in battle.

She had essentially shown the other nations that one half of the Weiss Hexen and Schwarz Hexen combo was weak. Naito had tried so hard, but she had tripped her up.

...I don’t like it.

She wanted to wipe the slate clean. She wanted to do away with her uselessness and weakness. And she wanted to eliminate Naito’s worries and be with her without getting worked up. So if she won here, she could slip away from the celebrations and have an all-night Naito festival in a private room on the transport ship.

“I can release everything that’s been building up!” she shouted aloud without thinking.

“Rr!!”

A roar from below tore through the bottom of the building and caused it to explode.

The destruction of the anti-air War Cry tossed Naruze into the sky.

She flapped her wings down to send her body further into the air and she leaped forward as if kicked by the flapping.

...The Hard Wolf!

Drake looked up into the air, but she twisted around and rotated before his gaze could follow her.

She landed twenty meters behind him.

Her secondary wings struck the air near the ground so she could land at high speed and she ignored the pain this caused in both her wings and her back. She was already in range of the War Cry.

And there was something she had to try from this position.

Before the wolf could turn around, she picked up a fragment from a broken shutter. She had spotted the fragment while up on the roof. It came from the grid area, but the hole meant for the wooden frame was empty. Naruze stuck a silver knife into that hole.

“That should do it.”

She lightly tossed it and it fell near Drake.

She had not failed in her throw; she had intended for it to land there. After all, that wooden fragment had a silver blade sticking upward from it.

...I threw it in case he would step on it.

And she had succeeded in throwing it. She was interfering with his justice, but she had not failed. She looked down at his feet as he turned and the broken shutter fragment was indeed there.

...But he's still walking normally.

That was important for her. That meant this attack would effectively hit the bottom of his foot with his full weight.

But after he turned around and took a step forward, something happened.

The wind blew through and knocked over the fragment of wood that had a knife in it. That looked incredibly unnatural to Naruze.

“Anything that will cause direct damage to your justice is rejected.”

“Testament,” agreed Drake as he arrived within fifteen meters of her. “That’s right. It is rejected at the point it actually takes effect, so I won’t reject you just because you’re wielding a weapon. But you can’t even use acupuncture on me. You have to use a compress.”

“You must be a difficult man to heal.”

She felt as if her best chance at a decisive blow had just been crushed. Acupuncture had existed in Europe during the ice age and had fallen out of use for a long period afterwards, but it had been passed down among the people who would become Technohexen. That was the reason being stabbed with needles and not feeling pain was seen as proof of guilt during witch trials. However...

“Acupuncture eliminates the stiffness of one’s body, so it falls under Schwarz Techno and isn’t my realm of expertise.”

“Would you have preferred I didn’t give you any advice?”

“That isn’t it.” Naruze shook her head. “I was just hoping the day had finally come when I could try it out myself. When I asked Margot before, she gently refused me by saying there are more enjoyable things in life.”

“You were seriously planning to try it out on me?”

She failed to see the problem since he was an enemy, but it was apparently still off limits.

“Also, you’re going to be in trouble soon.”

Drake looked at his feet, picked up the fragment with a knife in it, and threw it toward her.

She caught the line drive in her right hand and he asked a question.

“Could you try that same thing again?”

She was confused, but she prepared to make an underhand throw.

“ ... ”

And she tripped.

Naruze’s foot slipped and she fell to the side.

...*Eh?*

She frantically picked herself up off the ground that was warmed from the sun and she dropped the knife and fragment in front of her.

“How about that?” asked Drake. “That’s what you call optimization. England’s justice isn’t quick to declare someone a threat, but it remembers the intent of actions and can then predict disgracing actions and cause them to fail.”

So...

“You’re going to be in trouble before long. If you don’t hit me with some kind of attack soon, everything about you will be stopped as ‘a part of the process’. If

you aren't careful, even breathing could be viewed as the beginning of the defiling process and then your breathing will fail. ...Just like with my wife."

Naruze gasped at that last comment.

"Then your wife is...?"

"Well, it seems she enjoys that too. She says the feeling of dying while unable to breathe is wonderful, but I don't like the taste of cyanotic meat," he said. "So could you find a way to escape this danger so I can make my wife delicious again? Also, I still have my work as a member of Trumps to take care of yet I'm craving some chicken, so you'd be putting me in a tricky situation too."

The Hard Wolf took in a breath and puffed out his chest. Naruze realized he was preparing a War Cry.

"...!"

She charged forward just as the roar raced down the road.

The stone walls shook, shutters were knocked to the ground, and straw-thatched roofs were ripped up and blown about.

...But I...dodged it!!

The War Cry was only effective in a fan shape extending from the Hard Wolf's open maw, so moving forward meant more safe ground than moving back. The very back end of her wings had been grazed, but she flew forward regardless. She launched herself toward Drake while flying at as low an altitude as if she were running.

...This will work.

A method came to her in a flash of insight. It was not the best method, but it was her only option given the situation. And so she raised her wings a second time to fly even closer to Drake as he launched the War Cry.

"!"

But she tripped.

...Flapping my wings is seen as part of the process now!?

Her fall to the side eloquently answered her question. Flapping her wings had been determined a portion of defiling England's justice. Her black wings and her momentum sent her tumbling through the air and the wolf stopped howling while turning his entire body toward her.

“...!”

The lingering remnants of the War Cry struck her.

Drake turned around and looked down toward Naruze, so his War Cry sent her tumbling along the ground. She continued for three and a half rotations and ended up much closer to Drake.

“...”

The black-haired Technohexen came to a stop lying face down at approximately ten meters away. Her body shook irregularly as the shock of the impact caused her muscles to tremble beyond her control.

As the fallen angel coughed a few times, Drake took a few steps.

He did move toward her, but that was not his intention. He was changing his position. The reason for this action lay at his feet. Silver forks and sewing tools were scattered on the ground there. When Naruze had tripped, they had spilled from her pocket and flown toward him.

“How dangerous.”

He took in a breath and prepared his next War Cry while stepping over the forks and a piece of a window frame with a knife inside it.

“...”

He stopped with about seven meters to Naruze. While standing between her and her weapons, he finished taking in his breath.

He had no intention of approaching to finish her off. He had made sure she could not reach her weapons and he would now safely crush her from a distance. There was no reason to eliminate the advantage of a long-range battle now.

He looked up in the sky, opened his mouth, and a growl came from the depths of his throat.

“Grr!!”

But just as his howl began, an explosion burst from his chest and color spurted from his throat. That color was a scarlet that reflected the afternoon sun and it took the form of a spray.

“...!?”

His body shook as if it had burst and steaming blood sprayed from his entire body.

The Hard Wolf's body had been attacked such that it was damaged on the inside.

Naruze was trembling and could not even hold her mouth steady, but she saw the result of her actions.

The Hard Wolf before her remained perfectly motionless while still holding his knees apart and looking skyward. Bloody steam rose from his entire body and a shimmering formed in the sunlight.

This was the result of an internal rupture.

Naruze did not know if Drake had lost consciousness or if he was in a state of shock much like her, and she had no way of finding out. She realized strength had returned to her shoulders, so she rose up as if to crawl.

...Yes.

She looked down at Drake's unmoving feet. Among the forks and sewing tools he had stepped over was a knife in a fragment from a wooden frame. The knife had originally been pointed up, but when Drake had stepped over it, it had toppled over so that it would fail to stab him.

The bottom of the wooden frame was producing ether light. That bluish-white ether light formed a small crop mark frame Magie Figur which had carved a spell into the wooden frame.

"Bodily...reinforcement." She had done it.

She had poured all of her internal *auspuff* into the bodily reinforcement spell to give it several dozen times the normal power. This was no different from creating a charm and attaching it to someone. She had simply used the bottom of the wooden frame instead of a charm.

By applying the spell to the bottom of the frame and sticking the knife in the opposite side, the movement of Drake's feet had knocked the knife over and exposed the spell so it would affect him.

...And bodily reinforcement is something that aids justice, so it wasn't rejected.

She had thought up this idea from the moment Drake had drunk his milk. Eating could be a burden on the body, but it also supported one's body.

...So recovery and reinforcing spells will work.

Even when amplified many times over, bodily reinforcement spells did not cause any direct damage. It was standard practice to use cooling spells when amplifying them, but if one regulated their breathing and acted appropriately, they would not tear a muscle or the like. It was the same concept as taking one's time while transporting something heavy.

But Drake's War Cry was different.

That shout that shook the city temporarily put an immense burden on his lungs and muscles.

All Naruze had done was multiply that burden several dozen times.

England's justice would disgrace itself, but it would have to declare itself unjust to prevent that disgrace.

Rather than create the contradiction of declaring justice unjust, England's justice had carried out the act and sacrificed the bearer of that justice.

...Good.

A Hard Wolf could only be damaged with silver products, but he could damage himself. His lungs and blood vessels had to have been torn apart.

Naruze realized strength had returned to her waist, so she slowly raised her butt, brought her knees under herself, and rose up. She took a deep breath as she stood.

Her knees shook, but she endured using the compressed air remaining in her wings.

“ ... ”

Once she realized she had stood, she also thought she had won. Yet as soon as she felt relief, strength left her body once more. That exhaustion seemed to tug her body down.

“Ah...”

She felt as if she was drifting to sleep and she almost gave into that sensation.

...Not good.

If she did not announce her victory, she could not verify that victory.

“...Eh?”

But then the Hard Wolf turned toward her.

This was no optical illusion.

As bloody steam rose from his body, Drake raised his right arm.

...He can still move!?

There was no point in finding an answer to her question. With the smell of blood in the wind, the wolf's claws flew toward her.

“It's been a while since I've gotten a wakeup call like that! But you were still gentler than my wife when she plays her dismemberment game!!”

As the strike arrived, she felt more disappointed in herself than she felt despair or surprise.

...Margot!

She had been unable to prove anything to Margot. The fear of still being useless chilled her gut.

An instant later, she found herself tossed to the right.

After attacking the fallen angel by twisting his body and swinging his arm, Drake looked at his right hand and the light coming from the gauntlet.

“No flesh or blood on it and I didn't feel a solid hit?”

After a groan and a clench of his teeth, he looked past his outstretched claws to where he had knocked the girl.

That motion was enough for blood to spill past his oily fur and a wet, slipping sound to come from within his uniform as if he had jumped in a puddle. But he confirmed that there was no remnant or piece of his opponent on his claws.

“I don’t know how, but you avoided a direct hit!”

The black-haired Technohexen had been knocked away by his claws, but she was still alive and she was still moving. He could see her trembling on her side.

“...!!”

But she could not stand. This strike had been different from the previous War Cry impact, so her brain had been rattled and her inner ear was out of order. She tried to prop herself up on her hands, elbows, or knees, but she could not feel the solidity of the ground beneath her and her muscles messed with her organs instead of what she wanted them to do.

“Kah!”

She faced the ground and covered the dirt with the contents of her stomach. She fell into a sticky coughing fit, but her breathing quickly calmed down afterwards.

Drake observed the Technohexen as she roused her body like that.

“But externally, you’re unharmed.”

He spat bloody spit to the ground, traced his tongue along his bloody fangs, and let out an exhausted breath that carried the heat of blood with it.

“Testament. I think I know what happened. I already knew this was possible.”

He watched as she rolled on her side to keep her windpipe open. As he approached one step at a time, he focused on her wings.

“A needle.”

A single needle was located at the base of her wing.

But it was not sticking into her. It was sticking out as if growing from her wing so it would stab him. It seemed she had pressed it in from the inner side of the wing so it would pierce through to the outer side.

That needle was why his strike had not reached her.

She had not evaded the blow and he had not missed.

...She tried to stab me with that needle and failed. My justice made sure of it.

She had likely prepared it as an automatic evasion method, just in case. And she had guessed correctly.

“Testament. Not bad. But...I can still move.”

Hard Wolves could recover quickly and he had been hit with a bodily reinforcement spell several times over.

The spell was starting to fade, but his body’s recovery speed was high in the first place. In another thirty seconds or so, the burden on his blood vessels, lungs, and muscles would return to normal. That would leave only one problem.

“I need blood.”

Conveniently enough, there was a nice chicken right in front of him. Bone marrow was good for the creation of blood.

...As my wife says, it’s quite nutritious, but it only ranks second out of everything in the world. Why does she have to be so strict about staying healthy?

As he thought, Drake approached the Technohexen. She was no longer resisting, so he crouched down and raised his right arm above his prey once more.

“How about a little salt for flavor?”

Before he received an answer, he swung his claws down toward her medulla oblongata.

Naruze thought she heard a metallic noise.

It resembled something she had heard in the past. Nothing was clear to her in her current state, but that noise was carved into her memory as a remnant of a definite past she could never let go of. Back then, the clashing of blades had been meant to protect rather than to fight, but what about the current noise?

...!/?

She felt the heat of nonexistent flames and thought she heard someone scream. Whether to reject the sensation or to confirm it, her confused mind suddenly awoke.

“!?”

Drake stood before her, but so did someone else. The other person stood between her and Drake. They were short and yet wielded giant swords which had caught Drake’s claws.

“Tachibana Gin!?”

“Testament. I do not know if it is due to my officer position, but I was suddenly drawn into this strange place. I did not know what to expect, but it was certainly not to interfere in a battle between a Technohexen and a wolfman.”

Gin wore a vermillion and white uniform and wielded twin cross-shaped swords on her false arms. With a mechanical noise, she began gently pushing back against the wolfman’s white claws. Her arms were slender, but they did not look weak.

“Now then,” she said. “Tres España has retained the right to battle Musashi since the Battle of Mikawa, but I had not heard anything about England gaining that right.”

“All this violence here is just part of the festival entertainment.”

“Testament.” Gin nodded. “That is sophistry. You are using this chance to show off to both Musashi and the Testament Union, but you will attempt to write it off as mere ‘entertainment’ if you fail. That excuse will never be accepted.”

“And what are you going to do about it?”

“Testament.”

Naruze listened as Gin spoke in a confident voice lacking in any shaking or trembling.

“I shall correct England’s justice.”

“W-wait!”

Naruze forced out her breath. Her stomach and lungs had yet to settle into place and her throat reflexively throbbed a bit, but she managed to take in a breath and continue.

“Are you going to ‘save’ me!?”

And...

“Are you going to use that to justify attacking England!?”

Naruze wanted Gin to stop. This battle was between her and Drake.

...I can’t let myself be used by someone else!

In addition to that, Gin’s reasoning scared her.

...She’s entering the fight because England is acting “cowardly” by using sophistry to fight.

And that would lead to Tres España rescuing Musashi from an unjust England.

In other words, *they would be using Musashi in order to attack England.*

...And it would start by “saving” me as a representative of Musashi!

They were using her loss. No, it was even worse than that.

“Don’t decide for me that I’ve lost!”

Gin was robbing her of the chance to finish things with Drake, deciding that she was the loser, and then using her for Tres España’s advantage.

Naruze understood why this had happened.

She understood it, but she did not want to accept it. However, Gin spoke the reason without turning toward her.

“You were weak.”

“...!!”

She could say nothing in response, but she felt something pushing up within her chest.

...Dammit.

Something warm spilled from the corners of her eyes, but Gin did not turn toward her and Drake was no longer focused on her. She had been forced from the battlefield and Gin’s next words set in stone what was to happen.

“I will be your opponent, Sir Drake.”

Naruze scratched at the dirt in an attempt to stand, but the back of Gin’s right false arm suddenly faced her.

“Be quiet.”

Before she realized the cross-shaped light was a holy spell, her vision was already wavering.

...A tranquilizing spell!?

“This is the same spell used on Master Muneshige. Please go to sleep.”

Naruze could not even speak in protest. All she could do was listen.

“It is my turn now.”

Gin made a declaration while completely ignoring the Technohexen behind her.

“You are attempting to benefit yourselves while claiming this is a festival event as insurance.”

She looked up at Drake.

“In the name of the Testament, Tres España cannot allow this cowardly attempt to continue.”

“You just want an excuse to pick a fight with England, don’t you? You want something you can say we’ve done wrong to make sure we don’t call off the armada battle at the last second. ... Wait. Is this because of me!?”

“Do not try to pretend you are any better after provoking us with your attack on Lisbon.” Gin narrowed her eyes. “Not only did you secure the Musashi through cowardly means, but now you are attempting to improve your standing in the Testament Union. Does this come from Protestant utilitarianism?”

“Don’t force this into a bigger problem than it is. Once the armada battle starts, I’m sure you’re planning to quickly begin the retreat so you can escape with as little damage as possible. Build this up too much, and it’ll come back to bite you.” Drake laughed while also coughing up some blood. “At any rate, I take it you’re going to call us your enemy and insist on stopping us from sinking the Musashi via ‘cowardly’ means.”

“Testament. Evil must be judged either by the law or the Testament. In other words, you must be judged either during the Peace of Westphalia or in an official

war with us. That is the generally accepted method as stated by the Testament Union and the academy rules.”

Gin swept the Hard Wolf’s claws outward and held her double swords to either side without using excess strength.

“I request that you cease attacking Musashi. England has not gone through the proper procedures to take hostile action against Musashi. Using these methods for later benefit is a disgrace to the Testament Union and will harm the Testament Union’s coordination as we face the apocalypse.”

“That sounds to me like an excuse you just made up.”

Drake pointed behind Gin, but she did not turn around. Doing so would have left her open to attack, so she instead held up her left sword and checked the reflection in the blade without taking her eyes off of Drake.

The Technohexen was lying there. She was shedding tears on her side, but her breathing had settled into the gentle rhythm of sleep. Gin nodded once.

“Technohexen primarily engage in aerial combat and this one specializes in long-range attacks, so she did quite well against an English monster. ...Then again, her own wings may qualify her as a monster.”

“My primary battlefield is in the air too, you know?”

“Yes, but you are a man.”

“Are you sexist!?”

“Testament. Or would you prefer I say you have the courage of a girl?” Gin took a breath. “Also, my husband is a postman yet he is also the Peerless in the West.”

“I can’t beat that.”

Her right eyebrow rose a bit when she heard that.

“Prepare yourself. My cross swords can emit ether, so they can harm you.”

“I’m injured, you know?”

“Testament. And that means you are in need of some flesh and blood, correct? Or do you have something against the flesh of another man’s wife?”

“If I was Catholic, I’d be excommunicated if I agreed, wouldn’t I?”

“Testament. Thank you for the beast-like answer.” She took a slow half-step forward. “And just so you know, Master Muneshige came to defeat me even after being pierced through both sides of his chest.”

“Are you bragging about your husband?”

“Testament.”

She drew back her left leg and used it as an axis.

“ ... ”

And she suddenly launched her left arm toward Drake.

The attack had no lead-up.

It was difficult for Drake to react as the sword moved like a sudden gust of wind. He could not tell from which direction the attack came; all he knew was that a sharp force approached. However, his reflexes kicked in faster than his mind.

“ ... ! ”

He roughly pulled his body back. He realized the action was meaningless against the reach of a sword, but he had no other choice when faced with that silver light that seemed to chill the blood covering his body.

...What will you do when faced with my justice!?

She failed.

A high-speed surprise attack like that was only possible by a skilled swordsman, but then the Testamenta Arma kicked in.

“...!”

The leg she used as an axis slipped and her short body rotated in midair. But a moment later, Drake’s body *was knocked backwards*. That action that left a spray of blood in his previous location was fast enough to split the blood drops in midair.

“Kh.”

He doubled over and a supposedly impossible silver line raced across his chest from bottom left to upper right.

...Did she complete her attack without failing!?

He had thought she had failed, so he had to wonder what had happened.

...She didn’t trip.

In the instant he evaded, he had distinctly seen Tres España’s 3rd special duty officer trip due to her initial attack. But something had happened after that. While tripping, she had launched a second attack and kicked against the ground with her opposite foot to right herself.

Righting herself like that took more than just footwork. It would require twisting and bending her entire body. However, something else bothered him more.

“Your second attack reached me.”

“Testament. It is a simple matter. I observed some of your previous battle with the Technohexen. Your Testamenta Arma causes any attack to fail if it will defile your justice. But you harmed yourself with your own strength earlier. That means your justice is willing to harm itself as justice rather than defile the fact that it is just. However...”

“However?”

“Testament.” Gin held up both her swords. “To put it another way, your Testamenta Arma is honest and will not allow contradictions. That told me what I must do. If attacking will lead to failure, then an attack while failing will not fail as I am ‘already failing’. That contradiction breaks through the paradox preventing attacks from reaching you.”

Give me a break, muttered Drake in his heart.

His cheeks stiffened and he was well aware a smile of joy covered his face.

“But that failure only lasts an instant. It doesn’t last the entire time your foot is slipping. It should only be the moment your foot starts slipping and that moment should come as a surprise to you.”

“Do you prefer women who cannot ready their blade against a surprise attack? Your married life must be quite gentle.”

“I can’t compete with this,” he muttered under his breath.

He then looked down at his chest. His uniform was split and his bloody fur was exposed to the air.

The corners of Gin’s mouth slowly rose.

“What will you do now? Shall I prepare you a meal of flesh and blood? Will you take a bloodbath? Or will you sleep on the bed of the earth?”

“I feel like I just walked into the wrong house. But...”

He spoke not to lower his guard but to double check his next method of attack.

“My justice will analyze the process behind your attacks. It might even cause your breathing and everything else to fail. You won’t be able to see, hear, or even keep your heart beating. My justice doesn’t play around.”

“Testament. That should make for a decent handicap. You are used to hand-to-hand combat aboard ships, but you are not used to fighting down on the ground. I use Far Eastern swordfighting and I am the wife of Tachinbana Muneshige, the

Peerless in the West. I will show you that I pay no heed to justice, failure, or process analysis.” Gin went on to ask a question. “Do you know?”

“Know what?”

“Do you know when the Testamenta Arma were made.”

He did.

“Thirty years ago. Chancellor Henry VIII was given this one from somewhere.”

“Testament. It was the same with Tres España’s and those from all the other nations. Thirty years ago, the chancellors of each nation acquired the Testamenta Arma from somewhere and their power was used to hold the other nations in check and to defend their own nation. But I was not born thirty years ago.”

So...

“I was an unforeseen opponent for your justice.”

“Then I’ll have to make up for that, seeing as I was an unforeseen bearer of this Testamenta Arma.”

“Testament,” replied Gin with a smile.

As soon as Drake raised both sets of claws, Gin moved forward and swung both swords by raising her shoulders.

“I will teach you what it means to make a Tachibana ‘lose’ and what it means to have ridiculed the Peerless in the West.”

Chapter 34: Swimmer on the Road

CHAPTER 34

"Swimmer on the Road"



What can you not give up on
If you are to attempt that?

Point Allocation (Friend)

What can you not give up on

If you are to attempt that?

Point Allocation (Friend)

“Things are getting noisy,” said Scarred.

Tenzou looked around. They were near the Tower of London but had been unable to see Oxford as Scarred had wanted because it was sealed off.

...There are more people than before.

He had already noticed this, but it was different hearing someone else confirm that fact. However, he thought something felt off about how the crowd had grown. Normally, crowds in a city would grow as one passed by important transportation points such as large roads and carriage stops or as one approached important commercial or entertainment points such as markets or shows.

...But the crowds here do not seem to be using the main roads.

It felt more like people had been gathered here from the beginning and were now showing up.

Tenzou confirmed they were safe before speaking.

“Scarred-dono, why don’t we go somewhere else?”

He turned around and saw Scarred standing on the moat bridge leading to the Tower of London. She was speaking with the Lizardman guard, but that Lizardman eventually gave a generous smile and saluted. She smiled back and emulated his salute.

“Master Tenzou, it seems we can look around inside.”

“Eh? Isn’t this a type of royal palace?”

“It is partially open to the public during festivals and tours are held during normal days. It seems an elementary school will be visiting today. I did the same long ago, so how about I show you around?”

She crossed the wooden suspension bridge while Tenzou tilted his head. *How unusually forceful of her*, he thought.

...*But...*

They had cut across London, so why had he not seen any of England’s representatives or even any of his horrible classmates?

He had a bad feeling, but he knew those classmates could overcome any problem they were faced with even if they had serious problems with their personalities.

He followed Scarred into the Tower of London’s fortress and shadow covered him.

All the while, he anxiously trusted in the others.

John Hawkins of Trumps was battling Margot Naito inside the water that filled the air.

An underwater fight had a number of tricks to it. One of those was how difficult it was to change directions.

Hawkins solved this with help from Cavendish, his aide.

“Drop on Courses 1 through 4!!”

“Testament!”

His mermaid colleague was in a ship flying high in the air above and she dropped live ammunition obelisks into the water along certain course numbers. They would block the Technohexen’s path, directly hit her, and provide turning points for Hawkins.

He performed a turn now and approached the Technohexen for a trident strike.

The Technohexen held up her *schale besen* to defend and a muffled metallic noise rang out.

But he used that impact to swim off in another direction.

As he swam, he thought about how unsuited he was for the position of Drake's second-in-command.

He was the captain in charge of England's privateers and one of the ship club's leaders. According to the history recreation, he would later become admiral of England's navy, but he was more concerned with his position in the current world.

...I don't have to stand out that much!

He did not like conflict.

He thought of himself as a cold person.

To oppose the isolation in the water while swimming and to fight against his own previous lap times, he had to become one with the water.

However, he also felt England stood at a crossroads.

According to the history recreation, Drake was his relative despite being a different race. But after a few different battles, they had come to understand a certain fact: even if current history was modeled after the past, they were still living and taking action in the present.

...If we weren't here, someone else would inherit these names!

While a pirate, Drake had achieved such tremendous results that he had been knighted. That was a historical fact and everyone had rejoiced when it had been recreated. Drake had rejoiced the most of all, but Hawkins's cold self had wondered why they were so happy.

They were recreating history, so it was only natural for that to happen.

England would soon follow the history recreation in the execution of Bloody Mary, but that too was only natural. He had seen no reason to doubt *what was already set in stone* and he had felt those unnecessary emotions would only get in the way of history.

But about a month before, he had seen a certain event unfold.

That event was Mikawa.

The Far East's representative city of Mikawa had been lost and the princess who succeeded it had been urged to commit suicide. Those involved had indeed worked to give that inherited name to the princess of the branch family. That was a means of correcting the flow of history, but it had brought a certain fact to Hawkins's attention.

...Even the representative of the Far East can be replaced in the case of death!

They were nothing special.

Their position meant they had to recreate history, but that did not make them immortal. In fact, the Testament Union and other nations could force them to be replaced.

In that case, they could die at any time.

...I understand now.

He understood why Drake had rejoiced when he had been knighted according to the history recreation.

...He was rejoicing in his own survival and that he was doing a good job!

And that led Hawkins to realize that England stood at a crossroads.

Musashi of the Far East had arrived. Those representatives of the Far East had rejected the Testament Union's correction of the history recreation and they were

attempting to purify the mysterious phenomenon of the apocalypse that threatened to eliminate the history recreation altogether.

What meaning did they hold for Hawkins and the others? He and the others risked their lives to recreate history, but would these newcomers protect them or make them altogether meaningless?

Could someone as cold as himself rationally determine that?

“I will test the determination and strength you showed at Mikawa!”

While performing a Vassallo-style charge after his turn, Hawkins shouted from his heart inside the virtual water created in the sky.

...I will finish this in a single strike!

Swimming was done in a straight line. The water resistance made it difficult to travel in a curve and turns were normally done using walls. For that reason, it all came down to a single strike. It was an unthinkable strategy in a ground or air battle, but the enemy's movements were also weighed down in the water. Also, his opponent had fallen into the water, so she was a perfect target that lacked the initial speed needed for swimming.

And so he charged toward her. He would strike the Technohexen head on. As she attempted to escape the trident, he would catch her with the three prongs and pierce them into her.

He hit.

“...!”

The clear sound traveling through the water resembled something hard breaking.

The trident bent for a moment and Hawkins felt it strike something.

But he gathered strength in his abdomen to correct his posture and cut through the water.

If his opponent was still alive, the moment after attacking when he had slowed was the most dangerous. As such, he activated the accelerator installed in the trident. It used a Protestant holy spell to eject oxygen for thirty seconds.

The trident produced a water current from below the cowl that doubled as a kickboard shield and he quickly accelerated.

“Be skewered!”

Suddenly, a muffled sound came from the tip of the trident.

“!?”

A cold mass flew into his mouth and it was cold enough to stick to the warm inside of his mouth.

...Ice!?

Before he had time to think, the sensation at the end of his trident vanished.

In its place, overhead fragments scattered and fell down while reflecting light.

It was a mass of ice. He felt repeated cold impacts and the black form he thought he had skewered flowed backwards. Those black objects were the Technohexen’s three-corner hat and skirt.

...She created a decoy!

He understood what had happened. She had created ice with the reduction of Schwarz Techno and she had wrapped it in her hat and skirt to use as a shield.

Her Weiss Hexen partner had created a heated steam bomb to use against Dudley, so a spell to turn water into a mass of ice would simply require copying that spell and using the opposite type of magic.

Hawkins followed the flowing path of the black cloth and looked toward his feet. He had to check back there even if it meant lowering his speed.

“The Technohexen is down there, isn’t she!?”

When he looked down, his enemy was indeed there.

She was clinging to her cowl-covered broom and following him in a straight line.

She had lost her skirt, sleeves, and hat, but that had lightened her as she pursued him.

She had folded up her wings and hunkered down her body to lower the water resistance as much as possible. Two speedometer Magie Figur were opened on the front of the broom and three on the back as she speedily pursued.

She was desperate.

However, she was using an acceleration spell meant for aerial use and it was a non-incantation spell stored in the *schale besen*’s Orei Metallo.

Water resistance reduced many different things. When this Technohexen had fired at Mikawa, she had used a simple acceleration spell, but the water resistance would quickly rob her projectile of all speed. Unless she created a new attack spell that reduced the water resistance, she could not attack Hawkins.

...And she doesn’t have the oxygen needed to make an incantation.

That meant the Technohexen had no means of attack.

He understood why she was still pursuing him despite that. While swimming, he could not attack her if she was behind him.

But she was at a serious disadvantage with her wings and her own posture on the broom creating resistance. She also did not wear goggles, so she could not open her eyes as much as she might want.

But she did not give up. To ensure mobility in the water, she had cast aside all that was unnecessary and stopped worrying about appearance.

This battlefield benefited Hawkins, but she continued to pursue. That fact brought a feeling to his gut that was even colder than the ice he rolled around in his mouth.

...I see.

This was a conflict between those related to the history recreation.

“We can’t afford to lose.”

If they did, they and many other things would be lost.

The pursuing Technohexen likely had things important to her.

In that case, he thought. Do I have something like that too?

“...!”

He accelerated.

The battle was continuing and he had a method of winning prepared. However, being pursued by the Technohexen was not a step in that plan.

From what he had seen of the Battle of Mikawa, her primary weapon was coin bullets. She could likely fire them underwater, but the water resistance would quickly sap all speed from a single coin. Even a roll of coins would be meaningless except at close range.

For that reason, he had to put some distance between them and attack after performing a turn at an arbitrary point.

But Hawkins realized that plan was negligent.

...Cool down. Cool down and think it over properly.

Why was the enemy pursuing? This battlefield put her at a disadvantage and she could not breathe to perform an incantation.

...But she “can’t afford to lose”!

Hawkins gave instructions to Cavendish via his sign frame. Instead of speaking, he opened the curved sign frame keyboard on his trident’s grip and made a request with as few words as possible.

As soon as he saw Cavendish nod in understanding, a new movement occurred toward his feet.

After arriving within ten meters of him, the Technohexen’s speed suddenly dropped.

“!?”

He wondered why, but immediately arrived at his answer. She had opened two acceleration spells on the front of the broom and three on the back.

...She was using the two on the front to gather the oxygen emitted by my spear’s accelerator!?

The oxygen that scattered and dissolved into the water was held between the two acceleration spells on the front of the broom.

The wake held between opposing gravity had solidified into enough air for half a breath, so the Technohexen opened her mouth and almost seemed to plunge her face into it.

“Herrlich!!”

With that shout, several Magie Figures appeared around the broom.

There were eighteen in total. Six on the front, ten on the back, and two to secure another breath from the trail of oxygen Hawkins created.

...She put together a method to force her way through the water with nothing but acceleration spells!?

Hawkins saw the Technohexen quickly approach.

She moved in a straight line as if ignoring his acceleration.

“...!”

She lined up alongside him and simply continued accelerating to rush along.

The water pressing in could not completely fill the hole opened by the moving object, so a vacuum was created. The flowing water struck it and produced a tearing sound. Her hair danced about and her wings produced constant muffled noises as the water pressed in on them.

Hawkins could tell her method was highly wasteful, but she still managed to force her way forward.

She shook and vibrated while cutting through the water and the Magie Figures on the back of the broom created two pairs of serial accelerators. Rather than spreading out each individual acceleration spell, she lined them up to maintain thrust.

She clung to and accurately controlled the cowl-covered broom to raise her speed as much as possible.

She had to move in front of Hawkins.

...After all, her final attack during the Battle of Mikawa came from the brush.

The brush was primarily an accelerator, but it could also be used as a cannon. In this case, she would need to overtake him to fire on him.

Her acceleration was greater, so she would eventually circle in front of him and shoot.

Then what could Hawkins do? He chose the best answer from his different pre-prepared options and he sent instructions to Cavendish.

Naito pushed the broom's accelerator backwards with the backs of her thighs and clung even closer and lower down to Schwarz Fräulein. The water felt like colliding with a thick blanket and she could no longer open her eyes.

However, she was moving forward. Once she made it far enough forward, she had to fire the attack to defeat her opponent.

...I must win!

She felt like she was causing trouble for her classmates. If she did not protect Toori and Horizon's date, they could not determine their foreign policy and that would greatly affect Musashi's future.

...But I'm just as worried about Ga-chan!

Lately, Naruze had been trying to behave the same as normal. She had lost Weiss Fräulein and she was trying to keep that from placing a burden on Naito, but trying to keep her efforts from showing had created an unnatural version of herself.

That proved that she was still not completely open in their relationship and that she sensed danger in this kind of situation.

...And if I lose here, Ga-chan will blame herself.

She would accuse herself of placing too much of a burden on Naito. And the more she accused herself, the more boring a person she would be after they smoothed things over.

Naito did not want that.

And so she had to win. She would use her attitude and results to prove that she was fine even without Naruze's concerns.

...Doing it this way is a pain, but I don't have the guts to say it in words.

She was afraid Naruze would think she was the one putting distance between them, but she also hated that she was worried about that.

It meant she did not fully trust in their relationship either. That suspicion was proof of her own immaturity.

...Oh, honestly.

She was a being unfair.

She had noticed Naruze's worries and attempt to hide those worries, but in her own worries, she was unable to say anything about it.

...I'm no different, but I'm acting like I'm better than her.

It was unfair of her to act like she could do things any better.

...Someday...

Someday she wanted to be able to relax. She wanted to have enough trust to know their relationship was okay without having to say anything, even if they were far apart.

She thought about what would be the first step in that direction.

...I need to win here!

With that thought, she surpassed Hawkins and accelerated further.

She pulled out ahead.

Immediately, she rolled Schwarz Fräulein halfway to the right. She felt the pressure of the wall of water scraping along her cheek and heard a low creaking sound, but she managed to circle in front of Hawkins.

...I'm in position to fire!!

They were close together, so Naito determined her acceleration spell bombardment would cause enough damage even if it was not made for underwater use.

She had only one thing to worry about.

...I need to hurry!

She pulled a roll of coins from the mobile safe attached to the hard point part at her waist.

“ ... ”

But she sensed a shadow as she saw Hawkins accelerate toward her.

The shadow fell down from above like someone had placed eaves up there.

...What is that?

The current prevented her from turning her head to look up, but she managed to see what it was that fell at high speed through the water.

Eight identical objects were falling.

...Obelisks!?

The stone pillars were five meters long and had square bases with fifty centimeter sides.

They had the numbers 1 - 8 written at the top.

These obelisks were dropped down to allow Hawkins to turn. Most likely, Cavendish was firing them while also managing the pool.

The obelisks for Courses 1 - 7 fell in a circular formation around Naito. The stone pillars sank with bubbles trailing after them and they had buoys attached to the top to prevent them from falling too far.

However, this seven-part stone circle was positioned to cut off her escape.

“!?”

And then the eighth and final one arrived.

It fell above her head as she held Schwarz Fräulein. As if to crush her, the stone pillar dropped in a straight line toward her with a trail of bubbles behind it.

“...!!”

Naito realized the bottom was going to hit her.

Great trembling fell across the street and shaking spread out in all directions.

Two racing motions produced great roars with a quick tempo.

One of the racing motions was a white and blue half-dragon and the other was a child holding a giant hammer.

The hammer contained the Trumps emblem and the opposite end of the striking surface had a square-cross virtual vector nozzle created with a Modern Sign. That vector nozzle allowed it to freely accelerate in any direction.

Occasionally, the striking surface would swing down toward the half-dragon who ran along the street.

“Ahhhh! Why do you have to dodge it!?”

The hammer missed and the power of the nozzle caused it to rotate three times in the air. It was held by a boy with crests saying “8” and “Nicholas Bacon” on his large coat.

“Um, you’re called Urquiaga, right!?” he asked the half-dragon. “I saw you in the chancellor’s officers almanac! You can fly, right!? Then fly! Fly! I’ll knock you out of the air!!”

Nicholas smiled as he spoke, but Urquiaga simply continued running without speaking up in return.

...This is dangerous!

As far as possible opponents went, one using an impact weapon was better than most. He had the armor of his outer shell and his great physical strength. He was confident he could take a blow from a hammer this size without missing a beat. Even after he saw the spell light from the nozzle accelerating the hammer, his confidence did not waver. If he was hit, he would simply have to dig in with his feet or fly in the direction he was hit. Given the thrust of his wings and other parts that let his giant body dance through the air, a hit from an accelerated hammer was nothing.

But Nicholas’s hammer was a bit different.

“That is the Great Seal, isn’t it!?”

Urquiaga heard Nicholas say “Testament.”

“Yes, yes! Tes, tes! I’m the Lord Keeper of the Great Seal, after all!! I give a nice solid hit with this for all of England’s important, important decisions! With this, everything is a deciding match in England!”

But what mattered was what that meant.

“In other words, this is England itself!”

That was why it meant something else to be hit by that hammer. The striking surface with Far Eastern for “England” carved into it struck the air.

“You can let loose, Seal of the Queen!”

With a roar, the characters for “England” spread out in the form of light and fragments of light surged out.

“...!”

The street shook and the emblem of light shattered.

Urquiaga had enough spell knowledge to know what had happened. The emblem of England that expanded from the striking surface had contained *England itself* for just an instant.

If he struck near the ground, the instantaneous force of the strike would contain the weight of England’s entire landmass.

“Don’t run!”

After rotating once from the reverse thrust, he smashed it into the air. The emblem of light struck very near Urquiaga’s face.

“!!”

The impact tore through the air and a shrill trembling raced into the distance.

...Did that give him all of England’s air for an instant!

Urquiaga jumped back to evade, but his outer shell resonated with the vibration and his muscles stirred.

The Seal of the Queen was a divine weapon that could alter phenomena. What it expanded around itself changed depending on what it struck. Specifically, it depended on what the target was in relation to England. It was unclear how much variation it had, but it was definitely dangerous.

If it struck him, he would likely be hit by “that which was foreign to England”.

...In other words, all the “outsiders” in England.

He made a general estimate of the number of Musashi residents inside this barrier.

...From what I saw in the sky, at least three or four thousand!

Each individual would not create much of an impact, but it was an entirely different story when thousands were collected into a single instant.

I need to do something, he began in his heart. After all, his opponent was Anglican. He was a complete heretic. As a hopeful inquisitor, he could fight freely with no reservations.

Various delightful interrogation plans filled his head.

...But there is the race issue.

According to the data he had seen, Nicholas Bacon was a spirit. That was not unusual in England, but different types of spirits had to be dealt with in different ways. For example, water spirits would absorb water and were weak to fire while fire spirits were the opposite.

...I believe he is a standard spirit, but I do not know the details.

At any rate, he would use the spirit interrogation tools. Unlike those meant for humans, these used moonlight, catalysts, and ceremonies to cause certain effects in the spirits. Their use had to be more carefully planned because they could only be used once before needing to be prepared again.

He decided what tool to use first and then spoke from approximately twenty meters away.

“I have a question!”

“Hmm!? Tes, tes, tes. Go ahead, go ahead! What is it!?”

Urquiaga leaned forward in preparation to charge and shouted his question.

“Do you have an elder sister!?”

Urquiaga saw Nicholas puff out his cheeks.

“No! And it’s super rude to be thinking about girls in the middle of a battle!”

“Judge. I see. So you don’t.”

Urquiaga turned to the side, planted his feet on the road, and pointed at Nicholas.

“Nicholas Bacon! You have committed two sins!”

“Being a heretic?”

“No! That is an issue of your very existence that goes beyond a mere sin!”

He pointed at Nicholas with both hands now.

“First! You have no elder sister!”

The spectators clenched their fists and let out a cheer of understanding. Urquiaga nodded and continued.

“And second! You are not the younger brother of an elder sister!”

Standing on the road twenty meters away, Nicholas smiled and launched an attack at the air.

Urquiaga took a defensive stance while preparing to charge forward.

An impact of air shot toward him. All the wind and air pressure of England’s sky had been compressed into this one strike which the Seal of the Queen’s emblem of light had sent toward him.

But he was already moving with the initial speed of his charge.

“I soar!”

The outer shell thrusters on his legs opened. His physical strength had provided his initial speed and the accelerating Dragon Breath fired to push him even further.

He leaped over his opponent’s strike of air and continued onward.

Even twenty meters was close range for an aerial half-dragon with preparation time.

He planned to circle above the boy just outside of the hammer’s range and launch a full burst tackle as soon as he landed behind him.

“...!!”

He cut through the wind, but then he saw Nicholas smile and take action.

Having already hit the air, the hammer accelerated even further and struck the ground.

In that instant, Urquiaga noticed a certain fact about the Seal of the Queen.

...The nozzle isn’t producing the acceleration light that prevents recoil!

The strike into the ground would cause great recoil in the hammer, but the acceleration light meant to suppress that was missing.

“Fly, England!”

Nicholas and the hammer hopped up toward Urquiaga’s trajectory.

Nicholas flew up toward Urquiaga’s path in the sky.

And the hammer rotated as he held it overhead.

“This is a collision course, right!?”

The steel pick hidden in the sides of his shoes’ heels drew Protestant box crosses in midair and then stabbed into the air.

This secured Nicholas’s footing, so he remained stationary in the sky. But he bent his body and accelerated the hammer’s under swing with a smile on his face.

“Into the sky you go!”

The sky of England was fired toward Urquiaga’s face.

A great sound of impact rang out and the sky struck Urquiaga.

“...!”

The sound of the sky ripping open and an explosion of steam occurred ten meters in front of Nicholas.

The boy used the nozzle’s acceleration to swing the hammer around, stepped on the hammer portion himself, and rotated himself around.

“This makes me the first to gain a higher confrontation right!”

He had felt the blow hit.

After all, the strike of England’s sky was an attack that caused all of England’s airspace within range to be present in an alternate phase. A massive amount of air was compressed inside the attack range and it produced enough pressure to crush stone.

He only controlled the theatre stage’s space at the moment, so he could only compress that smaller region of air, but it should still have been enough to smash the half-dragon.

...Research shows aerial half-dragons can withstand the shockwaves of supersonic speeds.

When they had been deciding who would face which opponent, he had practiced on armor three times as hard as a half-dragon's external shell.

From that, they had learned his strike could completely smash a half-dragon's body and he had been given Urquiaga as his opponent.

When he had crushed the test armor, Shakespeare had made the following comment with a serious expression.

“You smashed that to a pulp. I wonder if half-dragons have something like a crab's brown meat.”

Jonson had praised her for being poetic, but it bothered Nicholas how they would occasionally outdo even a trickster like him.

He could not check for brown meat now, but he had definitely smashed the half-dragon to a pulp.

After all, this had been a counter hit. The intensity would have been even greater than the blow on the unmoving test armor.

“Heah!!”

Nicholas let out a joyous cry and rotated himself and the hammer around.

To prepare for his landing, he removed his feet from the hammer and hung down from the handle.

But then a white form burst from the steamy mist wrapping around in front of him.

“Urquiaga!?”

That was exactly who charged toward Nicholas, so Nicholas's smile stiffened.

“How!? That should've been a direct hit!”

He truly could not believe it.

He began to wonder if his memories of the destruction test had been lies. He also wondered if half-dragon armor was far tougher than research had suggested.

“If that air pressure had hit me, I would not have escaped unscathed!” roared Urquiaga. His external shell had several injuries and cracks in it. “But being struck by air while in flight is a normal part of life for a species that can reach supersonic speeds! And even when compressed, the sky is still the sky! As long as I can read England's air currents, *I can ride them!*”

The half-dragon thrust forward the front wings of both arms and his sharp nose as if to show them off.

“My race views the sky not as a means of attack but a place to fly! Your excessive pride in England led you to hastily assume its sky could bring down a half-dragon! The blue sky may be harsh to all, but that is why it is equal to all! In which case...”

In which case...

“This only applies to the sky, but England's sky is my ally!!”

With a cry of fright, Nicholas began moving back, but the half-dragon threw a pair of rings toward his arms. The metal rings attached to his wrists and the hammer's handle.

“You carelessly underestimated me! This is what you get, Protestant child! Be a good boy and accept your interrogation! Inquisition set #182! Spirit heretic arrest tool ‘Esposas de Mudo’!”

Nicholas could not move his arms as he dangled down from the handle.

In front of him, the half-dragon placed consecrated gloves on his hands and extended a gentle reverse U-shaped spike from the sole of his right shoe.

Just as Nicholas wondered what he would do, he grabbed Nicholas's legs and spread them.

“Crotch splitting torture #17! Electricidad Massage!!”

Urquiaga performed the torture technique in midair and was urged on by the crowd's cheering.

“...?”

But he suddenly stopped.

After a moment, the crowd looked up into the air in confusion as Urquiaga let go of Nicholas's legs, removed his own leg, placed a hand on his chin, and tilted his head.

“What's this? I do not feel anything there.”

While he thought, Nicholas raised his eyebrows and blushed with tears in his eyes.

“You're mean! You knew I was a spirit, didn't you!?”

“Yes, but you are not a girl.”

“That's not it!” shouted Nicholas while grabbing the Seal of the Queen's handle. “I'm a solitary unit, so I'm sexless! It's pretty common with spirits!”

Wait, thought Urquiaga.

Being sexless and a solitary unit was a trait of a microscopic or faint spirit. Even kobolds had differences between the sexes and even low-level spirits like sylphs that could not be seen by normal people held either male or female features. Possessing a sex was a way of preventing oneself from scattering.

...Spirits with an identity usually model themselves after a living creature in that way.

Nicholas had human size, he had a sense of self and memories, and he could be touched. A spirit of that level would have a fixed sex to prevent himself from breaking apart.

However, he had nothing of the sort.

...I know what kind of spirit he must be!!

Before he could express his surprise, Urquiaga made a certain decision.

He opened the thrusters on his waist and tried to escape into the air behind him.

He had captured his opponent's wrists and was preventing him from moving, but that would have little meaning. He had only managed to capture him due to the surprise.

...Once he calms down, he can escape it!

After all...

"Nicholas Bacon! I know what you are!"

"You only just figured it out? You're so slow!!"

Nicholas disappeared before his eyes, but he appeared again right afterwards. With nothing left to bind, the bracelets fell along with the handle.

As for Nicholas...

"I'm back!"

As the Seal of the Queen began to fall from the sky, something rose from the top of the hammer as if being peeled up. It looked a little more like a girl than a boy.

“Will you be kinder if I look like this? But you know what I am now, right?”

His smile was formed once more.

“I, Nicholas Bacon, am the Seal of the Queen’s guardian spirit!”

Urquiaga understood what that meant. Nicholas had not been given the Great Seal of England. He *was* the Great Seal.

If anyone tried to steal it or take it away, the guardian spirit would resist. If it was attacked, he would prevent that power from manifesting.

But the Seal of the Queen was manmade. Nicholas was a type of Tsukumogami, a spirit connected to an old tool, but this tool was newly made and did not contain the history needed for a spirit to reside within it.

“Are you a manmade spirit!?”

Nicholas did not answer.

He simply smiled and held the hammer while turned to the side.

Sensing danger, Urquiaga immediately tried to fall back despite his external shell’s thrusters not having fully gathered his Dragon Breath.

However, a hard sensation suddenly hit his chest.

“?”

To protect him, his reflexes caused his entire body to tense up and pointed his vision downwards.

He saw a metal bracelet had hit his chest. It was the one he had used to bind Nicholas earlier. Swinging the hammer had knocked it from the handle and launched it much like an underhand throw.

His combat training had caused him to reflexively act, but that had created an opening.

His slight pause had allowed Nicholas to complete one full rotation of his hammer.

“Time for a direct hit!!”

A direct hit would strike Urquiaga with something other than England’s sky or land.

“I’ll cram the power of all of England’s ‘outsiders’ into a single point!”

The power of all the “outsiders” in that theatre space would strike him.

Of the tens of thousands of Musashi residents in England, three or four thousand were here.

What would happen if all of that was concentrated on a single point?

Before Urquiaga could reach his answer, it was demonstrated for him.

At the same time as the Course 8 obelisk struck the Technohexen, Hawkins strongly kicked the nearby Course 4 obelisk.

He switched from Vassallo-style swimming on his back to a face-down dolphin kick. That allowed him to raise his head and check on his opponent and it let him ride his speed.

He moved forward using the strong acceleration from the kick.

He could see the Technohexen before him.

In the pale wavering color of water beyond his goggles, he saw her knocked toward the bottom of the water by the Course 8 obelisk.

The impact had put her on her back and aimed her weapon toward the sky.

The acceleration Magie Figurs had vanished from around her *schale besen*.

He could see her roll of coins sinking away from her.

However, she still tried to right herself and aim toward him again.

“...!!”

But the hit to the solar plexus had knocked all the air from her lungs and into the water.

She had breathed out all of the oxygen she had gathered with the opposing acceleration spells.

She had no way of performing an incantation and she had lost her roll of coins to use as a shell, so fleeing was her only remaining option.

“I won’t let you escape!”

Hawkins accelerated toward victory.

He held his trident out in front as he travelled directly toward the Technohexen.

But he saw her move beyond his goggles.

She could not breathe and had no means of attack, but she bent her body and moved.

...What else can she do!?

Even so, she moved.

She brought her freed left arm to her throat and loosened her scarf.

“It can’t be...”

She forced her collar open and a clump of air spilled out.

...She trapped some air between her breasts!

With her collar opened, the Technohexen gulped in the oxygen and let out a cry as she aimed her weapon toward him. She gave a short, sharp incantation and then shouted a single word.

“Herrlich!!”

Her close-range counter blast was made of ice created with her reduction spell.

She fired a fist-sized chunk of ice as soon as it was created. That was the result of her incantation.

But Hawkins reacted accurately to the ice shell fired right before him.

The trident’s cowl doubled as a kickboard, but he removed it and used it as a shield.

“Kickboard shield!!”

He forced the shield forward and the ice struck it.

A dull, low sound rang out and the shield trembled, but the force of the blow was uneven.

...Has she still not created a spell for underwater firing!?

The top half of the shield broke off as he deflected the attack.

He had no intention of allowing the Technohexen to stock up on that spell and he would not give her the time to make any other manipulations or setting changes, so he charged directly toward her.

He dove under the Course 8 obelisk where she continued to sink.

She no longer had the breath needed to emit a spell and she was simply holding up her *schale besen*.

She had no further means of attacking.

“...!”

He charged in, but then he heard a voice from Cavendish in his sign frame.

“Hawkins!!”

He heard the hint of danger in her voice.

“Course 8 is falling again!!”

An instant later, an extremely heavy weight struck his back.

The Course 8 obelisk had fallen on him as he accelerated with his dolphin kick.

Hawkins sank about a dozen meters as damage reverberated throughout his body.

He could not stop his sinking, the impact had knocked the breath out of him, and he could see the ground below.

...What in the world happened!?

Once he cooled himself down, he quickly found the answer.

When the Technohexen had been struck by the obelisk, she had instantly set her own acceleration spell.

...And she set it to supply acceleration to the Course 8 obelisk that hit her!

She had done so for a single reason: to reaccelerate the stopped obelisk so it would hit him.

That meant the previous ice attack had been to match his attack to the timing of the obelisk's fall.

“And so I would let my guard down!”

Hawkins slammed into the ground. Like a strike from a hammer, the obelisk pounded him into the ground and stopped sinking.

All the air left in his lungs left his mouth and his mind grew dim, but he had a sudden thought.

...Why do the others continue to test their fulfillment in their inherited names?

He felt it resembled something else, so he answered his own question.

“That sense of fulfillment...”

As he lost consciousness, he spoke.

“...is like a sport!”

Just before the Seal of the Queen produced its impact, the crowd grew excited over the reveal of Nicholas's identity and Urquiaga's danger.

But someone found it strange.

It was Noriki. His younger siblings were to his left and Ohiroshiki and someone else were to his right.

“Curry!!”

He ignored the curry and felt something intensely off about the composition of this festival.

...How strange.

The feeling was clear enough to put to words, so he spoke to himself while looking up at the half-dragon and the spirit that looked like a small boy or girl.

...*Why?*

He thought.

...*Why is Ohiroshiki rooting for Urquiaga?*

Next to him, Ohiroshiki was also looking up into the sky.

“Uqui! Uqui! Uqui! Look over here!!”

It was strange.

However, it was a *normal strangeness*. That strangeness was not what mattered most.

...*Why isn't he rooting for that spirit!*

Noriki knew it was strange now. Ohiroshiki was a strange boy. He was so strange that Noriki had felt it was a good idea to stand between Ohiroshiki and his younger siblings. It was unthinkable that he would abandon his faith and root for Urquiaga. Noriki's many long years of knowing the boy told him that for certain.

Anyone of their classmates who saw Ohiroshiki now would say “Eh?” He was sure of that. He understood that very well.

And if he understood it, he did not need to say it.

He tried to stop thinking by shaking his head.

“...!”

But he found he could not move his head.

...*What is going on?*

He was cheering.

But he could do nothing else and he found it difficult to think. He could make excuses about being nervous or focused on something else, but another possibility occurred to him.

...This is some kind of spell.

That would explain it.

He could remove the spell by punching it thrice with his own spell and destroying it.

...But I don't understand this spell. I don't even know if it really exists.

If he could not recognize the target of his punches, he could not perform the three strikes that started with the created spell named March.

Also, his spell was based in physical impacts. The only way to break the spell was to punch someone under its effects.

He understood that he did not want to punch himself, so he gave no more thought to the idea of doing so.

He could not yet recognize his opponent's spell, so that was another reason to avoid punching himself.

But then what was he to do? He managed to gather strength in his fist and listened to the voice next to him.

“Uquiquiquiquiquiquiqui!! Uqui-chaaaaan! Uuuuu!”

...I know. I'll return Ohiroshiki to normal.

Ohiroshiki had gone crazy. While his behavior might indeed be viewed as strange by some, it was normal in a certain sense. But it was strange for Ohiroshiki. It was not his normal kind of crazy. Someone had to return him to the proper type of crazy.

And so Noriki prepared his right arm.

“Internal Connection: Suwa Shrine. Spell: Creation Registration 031: Confirmed.”

Green torii light appeared from his elbow to his fist.

“Created Spell ‘January’: Activate.”

He opened his mouth and spoke not words of support but a comment he barely managed to squeeze out.

“With three punches I will return Ohiroshiki to normal.”

The Seal of the Queen’s direct hit against Urquiaga produced a high-pitched reverberation and the radiated annihilation of the emblem of light.

This strike carried the power of outsiders.

It hit and the crowd cried out as if swallowing their expectation and surprise.

“...?”

But the half-dragon was undamaged.

The attack had indeed hit.

As proof of that, he had tried to guard and had not done so in time.

The hammer was pressed against his chest, but he had not moved in the air.

The hammer had been stopped by his chest.

As a whole, the crowd seemed to be asking how, but a single voice rose up from the center. It was Ohiroshiki’s confused voice.

“Eh!? Huh!? ...Ah! What are you doing, Uqui-kun!? Why are you fighting the target of my faith!? Do you want me to poison your food!?”

Urquiaga looked at the hammer pressed against his chest.

...It did no damage?

That was exactly what had happened. He had felt an impact, but it had only been the normal force of the hammer with a slight addition. It had not contained the gathered strength of all the “outsiders” on the battlefield.

“Kh!”

The wide-eyed look on Nicholas’s face made it clear that the Seal of the Queen had not produced the desired effect.

But why?

“A fellow Far Easterner escaped this theatre space’s spell.”

The concept of “outsiders to England” only applied to the theatre space.

Normally, it would have gathered the strength of all outsiders inside the theatre space, but something else had happened this time.

“There was an even more obvious ‘outsider’ in this theatre space version of England.”

That was Ohiroshiki and only Ohiroshiki.

...The damage reduced from several thousand people’s worth to just an Ohiroshiki’s worth.

Urquiaga then heard something down below.

“Ah...”

His gaze turned toward the people’s surprised looks and the glowing strings of writing disappearing into the sky from the people, the ground, and everywhere

else. The spell creating the theatre space had started to come apart once the spell was removed from Ohiroshiki.

Nicholas also watched as the glowing words ascended into the heavens.

“It hasn’t broken yet, but it might be dangerous to fight in here. If this place becomes even slightly linked to the outside, my attacks would have the power of all of England’s sky or land.”

He lowered his shoulders and sounded disappointed.

“I need to give Shakespeare some advice. If she’s gonna do this right, she can’t just pitch a tent. She needs to make a building that won’t be shaken just because a single guest loses interest.”

He suddenly moved away from Urquiaga.

The spirit flipped around in midair and began to land with the Seal of the Queen still raised.

“If we continue, my power would get too dangerous, so how about we call it a draw?”

“Judge. I did not intend for it to happen, but I did destroy the stage.”

“Testament. Then I’ll be leaving!”

Nicholas landed in the center of the road, spun the hammer around, and bowed to everyone.

“I hope you can enjoy the other performances!”

Chapter 35: Detective Above the Stairs

CHAPTER 35

"Detective Above the Stairs"



Before it became "nobody"
Who was there?

Point Allocation (History)

Before it became “nobody”

Who was there?

Point Allocation (History)

“Even though it is called the ‘Tower’ of London, it is actually a castle.”

Tenzou listened to Scarred’s explanation as they walked down a wide stone corridor. Earlier, they had been walking along with the visitors from an elementary school and listening to the commentary from the lead teacher. It seemed that passion had been infectious because Scarred was being quite talkative.

“Western castles are often referred to as towers,” said Tenzou. “I’ve heard that is an old custom.”

He knew most of this already, but he felt it would be rude of him to interrupt as she moved from topic to topic. It was important to hear these things from someone who actually lived here, so he listened to her explanations while walking along.

“Judge,” she said despite having avoided saying so while with the elementary school children. “That is correct. You probably already know most of this, but Western castles are often referred to as towers because they were originally watchtowers built on an important hill or a manmade motte. In other words, they did not start out as castles. They were border-defense towers surrounded by walls. But as the courtyard grew bigger to contain the soldiers and the wooden walls changed to stone and grew taller, it became more difficult to see in all four directions from the central tower. To solve this, the walls were made thick enough for people to walk along and the towers were moved to the corners of the walls. Then a large building was placed in the center to provide living space and allow those inside to persist longer. Eventually, that building became the central palace.”

“Far Eastern castles were houses and mansions for powerful families from the beginning, so they are much more focused on living space. You can really see the differences in aspects like that.”

“Judge. Western castles are an evolution of a security tower while Far Eastern ones are fortified living spaces. And look.” Scarred pointed at the tower visible out the window to the left. “That is the southwestern tower where Double Bloody Mary is imprisoned. Western castles also have areas to hold prisoners in the basement or towers. Some Far Eastern castles have similar areas, but during the Middle Ages, Western feudal lords gained the right to pass judgment over their land, so they had to prepare their own prison space. This allowed them to instill fear in the people and to look like a just lord who punished criminals. The lord of the castle could easily force anything inconvenient onto a random scapegoat.”

Tenzou looked at the lace curtain covering the tower window.

...The person in there is bearing more than just her crime.

That crime came from the history recreation. According to Scarred, this was saving her, but he was unsure how much he accepted that.

For a ninja, the word “duty” meant risking one’s life, but that only applied when protecting his master’s life or infiltrating enemy territory. It was almost entirely unrelated to his life in the academy. But if he did bear some responsibility in his everyday life in regards to the fate of the Far East...

“Master Tenzou?”

After moving a few steps ahead, Scarred turned back. Once he noticed, Tenzou hurriedly caught up.

“Sorry.” She smiled bitterly. “Did I say something that made you worry?”

“No. I just realized how much there is to learn in England is all.”

“Judge. Thank you very much. But I think we have been the ones learning from you.”

They soon reached the end of the corridor and entered a small hall below the northeastern tower that contained a staircase up into the tower. The hall had carpets, sofas, shelves, and bows and arrows.

Scarred held a hand out toward the fireplace that had no fire at the moment.

“On cold days, the guards take their breaks here. And when they do, they sometimes see something.”

“See what?”

“Judge. A ghost.”

Scarred lowered her shoulders and gave an upward glance toward Tenzou.

“In every part of England and different areas of London, you can find the vestiges of the Celtic age and the lingering souls of fairies and the dead due to the chaos of the Middle Ages. These are different from the fairy races or the ghosts of those who have unfinished business after their death. Some are bound to the location of their death and some move from place to place, but they have almost no sense of self and they simply wander and occasionally attack the living.”

Kimi-dono would faint if she heard about this, thought Tenzou.

“Whose spirit is seen here?”

“The one here is Queen Anne. She supposedly appears as the spirit of a headless woman.”

“I see.” Tenzou nodded and glanced around. “Queen Anne was Henry VIII’s wife and Fairy Queen Elizabeth’s mother, but she was ultimately beheaded. Also, she was originally the maid of Catherine, the king’s previous wife.”

“Judge. I’m impressed you know that much.”

While preparing for this, Urquiaga had brought him a PC loaded with “One After Another with Henry VIII”, but he could not exactly say he learned this with a porn game.

He had decided to study due to his conversation with Scarred at the graveyard, and he had found having a clear goal made him hit the “next line” button much more quickly than usual. The next thing he had known, he had completed every character’s route, gone to a divine network walkthrough site, and corrected the many errors in the walkthrough Toori had already written. *Toori-dono, that choice was “Take this! Special Attack – Defender of the Faith!” But anyway...*

“You could say it is thanks to the hobbies of Far Eastern boys.”

He was not lying, but Scarred narrowed her eyes.

“Then did you know this? The previous wife, Catherine, was supposed to give birth to Bloody Mary, but she was unable to have children.”

“Eh?”

She took a step closer and continued speaking while looking at him with upturned eyes.

“There are different conditions people can have and Queen Catherine was weak. The Testament descriptions say Henry VIII changed wives because she could not give birth to a prince, but that is hardly surprising when she could not have children in the first place. And when the Testament Union asked about it, England came up with an excuse. They said that Catherine’s child, Mary, had been hidden by fairies.”

“Then...who is the Bloody Mary who came later?”

Tenzou realized that was an odd way of putting it. According to what Scarred had said earlier, England’s Bloody Mary had inherited the name of Elizabeth’s half-sister Mary “Bloody” Tudor and the name of Mary Stuart, Queen of Scotland.

But if she had inherited both those names, *when and to whom had she been born?*

He did not know.

But Scarred seemed to notice his confusion because her smile deepened.

“I should be able to talk about that later. But with this much as an introduction, there is something I wish to show you. ...Please come this way.”

He followed as she moved to the staircase at the side of the small hall that acted as a break area.

“Where does this lead?”

“The Tower of London’s southeastern tower. I wish to show you something I think you will find interesting. Oh, but this is not used to hold prisoners. It is a small reading area.”

“I see.”

Tenzou looked around as he entered the staircase, but there was no one around. He could hear voices coming from Oxford in the distance, but that was likely the festival. He started after Scarred who seemed somehow lively.

“ ... ”

At that moment, a gust of wind clearly not from the ventilation brushed his neck from behind.

Tenzou sensed a human presence behind him, so he turned around.

“!?”

But no one was there. The empty corridor continued on and he heard laughing children in the courtyard.

There was nothing out of the ordinary on the stairs either.

“Is something the matter?”

“Oh, uh... No...”

He rubbed the back of his neck and placed a foot on the first step. He looked back again for a moment and then followed Scarred who quickly ran up a few steps.

...What was that presence?

He followed Scarred up the stairs and sensed no further danger. Scarred turned back toward him from above with a confused look.

“?”

“It’s nothing,” he said. “I was just noticing that you can open the walls here to fire arrows out.”

“Oh, now that you mention it. I never noticed that before.”

Scarred sounded impressed as she slowly moved ahead. Tenzou followed and the color blue unavoidably entered his eyes. The blue came from a portion of Scarred that was illuminated by the light entering through the window.

...Why are butts so round?

His thoughts took a philosophical turn, but he then recalled that people had worshipped the butt god since before the Age of the Gods. *I was always more of a breast man*, he reminded himself.

...But I could make an exception for Scarred-dono.

He frantically shook his head. He did not need to ask why he was thinking this, but he knew he should not be thinking it. He had no idea how Scarred felt about him, so he could not look at her with such appraising eyes.

“Master Tenzou? Is something the matter?”

She twisted around which pointed the water lily in her hair toward him, so he frantically shook his head again.

However, he had definitely been looking at her.

“I was just noticing...how nice you look in that outfit.”

Her eyes opened wide, but they quickly narrowed and bent in a smile.

“Judge. Thank you very much.”

He very nearly reflexively replied with “You mean I can look!?”, but as a breast worshipper, he restrained himself.

After a few more steps, they reached a landing.

“This is the place,” said Scarred as she led the way. “I wish to show you something here.”

The tower was approximately seven meters across. About a third of that was taken up by the landing and the remaining space lay beyond a decorative wooden door.

“Is it a room?”

“Judge. It is a study of about twelve square meters.”

“A study?”

As he tilted his head, she pulled a key from her pocket and inserted it in the door.

...*A key?*

The necessity of a key suggested this was not a part of the usual sightseeing course. The fact that Scarred had the key was also puzzling.

“Master Tenzou.”

“...What?”

“Please come in.”

She introduced the place.

“I believe this is the most useful thing I can show you.”

It was...

“This study belonged to Henry VIII, father of the Fairy Queen, the man who changed England’s official religion to the current Anglican Church, the almighty king who laid the foundation of England’s current form, and the one who bragged he could pull out Excalibur.”

Tenzou entered a semicircular room. The wooden ceiling was at a decent height, but the room was dark.

“It is fairly cluttered, but please do not worry about it. I will open the curtains.”

Scarred walked over to the windows on the south and east walls. The walls were stone, so she had to lean out a fair ways to reach the curtains and shutters.

“Nn...”

...Sticking her butt out like that is impeding my breast worship.

After she knocked at the eastern shutters a few times and started for the southern side, a good amount of light filled the room.

A large desk sat on the northern side and bookcases and work benches filled the rest. There were also piles of books and boxes of specimens. Tenzou also saw brass instruments, guitars, and tools such as a microscope and telescope made by K.P.A. Italia’s Fino Alba. He saw something in the shadows by the desk that looked like armor.

...But I’m most interested in what is hanging down from the center of the ceiling.

It was a map of the Far East. Red pins were stuck in at important points and capital cities.

The locations of the pins told him something.

“He must have been a tall and well-built person.”

“Judge. In the history recreation, he was often compared to Felipe II, the skinny ‘paperwork king’ who has money but holes up in his study due to a weak constitution. But of his contemporaries, he was most often compared to Chancellor Carlos I who was the paperwork king’s predecessor in Tres España and emperor of M.H.R.R.”

“I hear Chancellor Carlos I was quite a talented person as well.”

“Judge.” Scarred opened the southern curtain and leaned out toward the window. “It seems Henry VIII and Carlos I interacted a lot.”

The interactions between the great chancellors who represented Europe were something not covered in school, so Tenzou looked up.

“Is that true?”

“Judge. According to the history recreation, Catherine, Chancellor Henry VIII’s first queen and the mother of Bloody Mary, was Chancellor Carlos I’s aunt. Also, Tres España and England had already been interacting to discuss the major nation of Hexagone Française. If Tres España, M.H.R.R. and England worked together, they could surround Hexagone Française on three sides, so Chancellor Carlos I and Chancellor Henry VIII communicated to bring those three nations together.”

Scarred smiled bitterly.

“But during these interactions, Tres España sold more and more trade goods to England. The money from that and their trade with the New World resulted in a large increase in population. This led to a need for more goods, but they made

more money with the New World trade than domestic industries, so everyone went there. Ultimately, they lost the proper balance between supply and demand, their level of self-sufficiency with domestic industries dropped, and they had to rely on importation to support their increased population. But that meant no money remained in their nation no matter how much they made in trade with the New World. They attempted to strengthen their trade with the New World to compensate, but...”

“But to advance their policies and to strengthen the monarchy, they eliminated all heathens which weakened their financial ability and left them with even less money, right?”

“Judge. They were investing in projects to make money in the New World, but by the time the results returned, their reliance on importation had sucked them dry and the profits went to other nations. None of the money would remain with them, so they would invest in more projects and it created a downward spiral. They are attempting to escape that spiral under Chancellor Felipe II, but they seem to be having difficulty reviving domestic industries. Their war with England is a part of that. They are attempting to monopolize trade with the New World along with Tres Portugal, but England’s privateers are opening holes in that.”

Tenzou’s classes had covered Tres España and Tres Portugal’s New World trade monopoly.

...I believe that was the lecture where Ohiroshiki-dono received his third execution.

That reference point helped him remember the lesson itself.

“That is where the Treaty of Tordesillas and the Treaty of Zaragoza come in.”

“Judge. Well done pronouncing the first one right.”

“Is it that difficult?”

“The Treaty of Tordesishas.”

Scarred froze in place with her hands on the shutters and Tenzou began thinking a moment later.

...Not good! I need to say something!!

1: My horrible classmates' mispronunciations are way worse! → That's just a race for the bottom.

2: That side of you is cute too! → I wish I had it in me to say things like that!!

3: Change the subject → That's the coward's way out.

Tenzou thought and chose #3.

“Wh-what kind of treaties were those? From England's point of view, I mean.”

“W-well, the former drew a line from north to south in the Atlantic Ocean to the east of the New World while the latter did so in the Pacific Ocean. And only Tres España and Tres Portugal could enter within that line...in other words, only they could go to the New World. At the time, the pope was reliant on Tres España, so the treaty passed with the pope's approval. That is why England is not using 'English ships' to oppose them. We are instead using criminals...that is, privateers. Otherwise, it would be an act of war that made even the pope our enemy.”

I see, thought Tenzou as he watched Scarred from behind. I am not turning my back on my breast worship. I am merely using this scene to help me remember this information.

“It seems the different nations are quite busy with all these connections and separations.”

“Yes. We are often changing between enemy and ally. And that understanding has brought a certain kind of optimism to Europe. Even if someone is an enemy during our generation, they might be an ally during the next,” said Scarred. “And

during the previous generation – Chancellor Henry VIII’s generation – M.H.R.R. Emperor and Chancellor Carlos I visited England.”

“This is part of the interaction between great chancellors you mentioned before, isn’t it? One was a skilled enough chancellor that no one doubted his bragging that he could pull out Excalibur and the other was an emperor-chancellor who ruled in two different parts of Europe.”

Both were commonly used in porn games. Tenzou was fairly certain no game had ever featured both of them and he suspected that realization might be his ticket to great success.

Scarred then placed her hand on the shutters.

“But there is one interesting thing about that visit.”

“What is that?”

“When they met for the first time, Henry VIII said the following to Carlos I.”

She spoke the words with her back to him.

“Long time, my friend.”

“What?”

After he spoke his question, Scarred remained motionless. She lowered her hands from the shutters and spoke into the dim room.

“Queen Catherine scolded Chancellor Henry VIII and he apparently claimed to have mistaken Carlos I for an old friend because his wife had spoken so much about him.”

“Scarred-dono, are you trying to say the two of them knew each other from somewhere?”

She did not reply with “judge”, but she did speak.

“I spoke of Bloody Mary’s birth earlier, didn’t I? Queen Catherine could not give birth to her, so England claimed she was ‘hidden by fairies’.”

“What about it?” asked Tenzou.

...This isn’t good.

They were doing nothing more than gossiping. Just for fun, they were discussing an occult story that did not matter and which could not be proven or disproven.

However, the situation made it dangerous.

...This is Chancellor Henry VIII’s study.

In horror plays, it was standard for the couple happily gossiping like this to disappear. *I can’t let us die here*, he thought.

After all...

...This B-grade cliché is supposed to come after the shower scene!

But he then remembered that he had already made the once-in-a-lifetime memory of bathing with her, so he realized his life might very well be at its end.

“What about the fairy excuse?” he asked in resignation.

“Judge. Do you know why that excuse was accepted?”

There was no way he could, but having already given up, he simply shook his head. He heard her laugh quietly before sighing and speaking.

“Because there was a precedent. There was an incident in which three close friends were ‘hidden by fairies’.”

More specifically...

“One was Chancellor Henry VIII before he inherited his name, one was Queen Catherine who had come from Tres España to study abroad for middle school and had also not yet inherited her name, and the last one was...Anne Boleyn.”

“ ... ”

“There are no clear records of when the three of them disappeared. After all, it was before any of them inherited their names and Queen Anne was a dryad. Any records that did exist were erased by Chancellor Henry VIII after he inherited his name. Also, anyone who knew about it was distanced from him or disappeared. He said it was to prevent them from using that incident to cause political conflict. ...Anyway, the rumor is that the three of them were ‘hidden by fairies’ for about a year.”

“A year?”

“Judge. It is not known what happened during that year and it is possible he met Carlos I during that time. But...”

But...

“It was because of that incident that no one doubted it.”

Before Tenzou could ask “doubted what?”, Scarred opened the shutters.

The light entering from the south was bright and Tenzou looked away from her as she turned around in that dazzling backlight. He could not see her face, but she pointed to the northern side of the room.

He turned to look in that direction.

“Because of that incident, everyone thought Henry VIII would eventually return.”

Past the desk, something was drawn on the north wall and its closed shutters.

“In the Far East, you call that the Double Border Crest, don’t you? And this is what you call the Princess Disappearances. Master Tenzou, this is what I wanted

to show you. Chancellor Henry VIII, England's 'almighty king', vanished in the method you are investigating."

As he looked north, she said "judge" from behind him and then spoke aloud the words written on the Double Border Crest.

"Long time, my friend."

She took a breath.

"Was this the work of fairies, or was it something else?"

Chapter 36: Rude One in a Hiding Place

CHAPTER 36

"Rude One in a Hiding Place"



What is only realized upon running into it?

Point Allocation (Size)

What is only realized upon running into it?

Point Allocation (Size)

Cheers returned to the street that's surface had been scraped away.

The cheers were caused by the battle between a Hard Wolf and a girl with two false arms.

Drake's War Cry could not harm the theatre space's audience, but none of them failed to raise their voices in response to the theatre's performance. Their enjoyment of watching the battle while using the buildings to hide from the wolf's destruction quickly grew into cheers for the wolf and the girl who seemed to fight using acrobatics.

“—————!!”

They flooded into the street and filled it with voices and movement.

The people's gazes gathered on several lines of racing silver light. Those lights were produced by the wolf's claws and the blades on the girl's false arms.

They exchanged high-speed silver attacks while dodging, deflecting, striking, rushing in, or falling back.

The people knew that the wolf was England's hero and that the girl was England's enemy and one who defiled justice.

They also knew that those who attempted to defile England's justice would fail.

But they also knew that, possible or not, this battle was entertaining. Whether they sympathized with or begrudged the one who succeeded and whether they sympathized with or mocked the one who lost, it was equally entertaining. Lastly, the people knew that, possible or not and success or failure, there was something that separated the two outcomes and they knew what that separation was called.

“This is a challenge!!”

They all shouted.

“Go for it, challenger!”

“Accept the challenge, hero!”

In response to their repeated cries, the false arms let out mechanical noises and the wolf knocked away the blood covering his body.

As they exchanged blows and evaded while almost standing still, the density of attacks grew.

Drake gave an impressed mental whistle at the intensity of the flow between the two of them.

...This is amazing. Both of us are amazing.

Gin's attacks failed, so she would attack again while failing.

However, that method of fighting had one clear flaw. To attack once, she had to make a leading attack that would fail. It was only on her second attack that she finally achieved an initial attack. On top of that, the attack was an improvised one, so it was difficult to achieve a clean hit.

But all that only applied with a normal attacker.

This is incredible, thought Drake. This girl isn't normal.

When it had started, her foot had slipped and she had used that for an attack. It had been cute. When faced with the childish action of tripping, she had swept in her other foot to support her body and to attack.

But that had not been enough.

...After all, my justice will learn the process.

From a certain point, she had started tripping the instant she tried to swing her swords. Brachium Justitia had learned the process of Gin's actions and had her fail at the initial step.

But she had not been normal.

...She changed how she uses her swords!!

She had added many different variations into that initial step: back hand, side snap, different patterns using altered angles, mechanical strikes that relied on the motion of her false arms, etc.

“You have a lot of different techniques!!”

“Testament. I am using martial art forms.”

Gin attacked as if dancing as she built the tripping and other failed strikes into her movements.

“After thousands or tens of thousands of sparring matches and practice swings, your body truly learns these forms and can release them from any angle or situation. I can make alterations that your justice cannot view as the same ‘process’.”

She even rotated the wrists of her false arms to attack from angles impossible for a normal human.

And...

“Testament. Let us increase the density.”

The silver lines coming from her suddenly increased.

...Double!?

What is this? thought Drake.

It was odd for the number of attacks to suddenly double. For one thing, she could supposedly only attack once for every two attacks.

...Did she suddenly start attacking once for each and every attack?"

His question gave him the answer. Each of Gin's attacks was getting through without failing. She was no longer swinging her swords twice with the second swing being the real attack.

He began to wonder if she was ignoring England's justice.

...No, that isn't it!

"Are you using your shoulders or elbows for the initial attack!?"

"Testament. I throw a jab and then attack with a sword."

The elbow or shoulder attack was built into the motion of swinging her sword, but it came first and would fail. Because that jab was a compact motion, it was more efficient than a failed sword swing.

This resulted in the increased speed.

If her foot slipped, she would change her footwork as if dancing. If her false arm malfunctioned, she would add in a different motion or adjustment and use the new action for her attack.

No matter her stance, she could use any kind of attack and continue to use them.

"This is the principle behind how the west's strongest swordfights!!"

The two false arms gained and cast aside countless successes and failures.

"...!"

The failures came from every direction and the methods were countless. A bird or cat would cut across her path, a spectator would collapse from anemia, a flowerpot would fall from the windowsill of a building bordering the road, water sprinkled on the ground would create mud, a banana peel would be underfoot, a gust of wind would blow through, a bucket would roll over, extremely localized rain would fall, a runaway horse would rush toward her, an accidentally-sent divine message would reach her, or a small-scale fissure would open in the ground. Gin failed as she avoided them all, but she would always continue attacking afterwards.

At some point, the spectators noticed that Drake had gone on the defensive.

Even with the failures included, the overwhelming amount of attacks required him to defend justice.

“England may have justice,” said someone in the crowd. “But does it have its hands full when defending against so much?”

The crowd stopped cheering, stopped moving, and simply watched the battle continue.

But a certain moment finally arrived.

“...!?”

As Gin attacked, she let out what sounded more like a cough than a questioning gasp and she took half a step back.

The wind wrapped around her as she fell back, but Drake stepped forward and sent his claws after her.

“Did you see that!? Even your breathing has been deemed part of the ‘process’!”

He ran forward as if preparing to tackle her and he rotated both his arms.

“A shame I don’t like cyanotic mincemeat!!”

He used the momentum of his charge to slam both sets of claws into Gin's unmoving body.

As he made the decisive attack, Drake saw it happen.

Below the bangs covering Gin's downturned face, her mouth opened in a small crescent moon.

"What...a...pain."

She had trouble speaking due to her failed breathing, but her voice suddenly grew much clearer.

"I suppose I should change to my combat breathing technique."

"!?"

She changed her breathing. She used a different method than the one deemed part of the process.

Under this new breathing technique, she could repeat all the previous attacks.

But Drake had a thought: none of those previous attacks had reached him.

...It can't be...

None of her previous attacks had been able to *reach* him.

...Is that why she had me charge in toward her!? She had me bring myself into reach!?

Even so, he had taken action first, so his claws would crush her from above.

"Oh, dear. Someone left a banana peel here."

Gin's pivot leg stepped and slipped on a banana peel.

Her body fell backwards as if to land on her butt. The tripping motion lowered her backwards and that meant she had escaped his claws.

And on top of that, she could use the failure to launch a successful attack.

Sure enough, her mechanical arms sprang up from near the ground.

“Well, Sir Drake? Did the west’s strongest lose?”

Before she even finished her question, Drake felt both his arms be severed and sent flying into the air.

It happened in an instant. The two false arms rotated as if doing the backstroke and the twin swords held by the hands sent Drake’s arms flying from his shoulders and high into the air.

It did not end there. Gin jumped backwards. The momentum of her false arms rotating backwards pushed her feet up and she pressed the bottom of her feet against Drake’s chest.

“There.”

She jumped away so as not to be dirtied by his advance. She instead used the momentum of that advance to make her leap. She jumped around a dozen meters back, spun around in midair, and prepared to land.

Once she landed, she would only need to name herself victor and it would be over.

Or so she thought.

Everyone, Gin included, saw the “disarmed” Hard Wolf open his jaws.

“——!!”

He prepared his War Cry.

The internal damage from Naruze had yet to full heal. Blood began spewing from his shoulders in sync with his pulse, but he took in a deep breath.

“Fff!!”

That breath was in preparation for the War Cry, but it also tensed up every muscle in his body. That gathering of strength tightened the muscles in and around his shoulders which temporarily stopped the blood. The tightening of the muscles caused the bone to stick out as he gathered his breath for when Gin landed.

Gin could not evade in midair, so she would have to intercept the attack.

“Arcabuz Cruz!!”

The long cannons appeared in the air behind her false arms. They were unwieldy at close range, but that did not matter here. She aimed one as the failure and the other as the actual attack.

“Fi-...”

“C’mom, stop that, Gin.”

“What is this ‘fff’ nonsense, you stupid Hard Wolf?”

The two duelists were hit by a tsukkomi chop or a kick from someone wearing their school’s uniform standing behind them.

Gin had her landing thrown off.

As she fell to one knee, she thought to herself.

...Mh. If Master Muneshige learns about this, he’ll treat it as “cute”!

Feeling disgraced, she turned around and saw Velázquez's mustached face beyond the Arcabuz Cruz vanishing into their two-pitch space. He sighed with his weapon of a giant brush resting on his shoulder.

"Just stop this for now. Okay, Gin?"

"Why? I see no reason to answer with 'testament'."

"Your reason to fight has grown unclear. Look."

Velázquez pointed toward the wall of spectators. They opened a path where he pointed and the point where the battle began came into view.

The Technohexen had collapsed there and the spectators had supposedly been watching over her.

However...

"She's gone?"

Instead, a single white-lacquered arrow was sticking into the ground.

The meaning behind the arrow was given by the English uniform that had kicked Drake.

"She was rescued by a spell from Musashi's sharpshooter shrine maiden. That's why we were sent in to mediate...or rather, admonish you two."

The speaker was a woman. The bottom of her uniform had been given a leaf-like texture, she wore a stole instead of a coat, and a bandana was wrapped around her green hair that had ivy growing from it.

"A dryad... Are you Pirate Queen Grace O'Malley?"

“Testament. I prescribe medicinal herbs to this stupid wolf’s wife. I was worried because she hadn’t been eating much lately, but it looks like her husband is filled with a little too much energy.”

She kned Drake and he crouched down without turning toward her, but his arms were now connected to his shoulders. Ivy had extended from the tree-like oar in her hand and that ivy had forcibly sewn his arms on.

“After they’re connected, the ivy will wither away on its own.”

Grace tore away the rest of the ivy with a kick. Blood spilled from the reddish-purple dyed end of the ivy and Drake winced a little. However, he could already move both arms.

She had seemed to kick him a few times, but she may have actually been applying healing spells.

Grace took a breath and her Celtic ivy-patterned earrings shook.

“With your reason for this battle gone, it has to come down to a personal fight. If you insist, this idiot will go along with it.”

“Wait,” cut in Drake. “Why don’t you help me out?”

“I have to get home and help my daughter with her homework. Unfortunately, her math skills seem to take after her father.” After rejecting Drake, Grace turned back toward Gin and nodded. “You managed to show off your stance here and I know you’ll go through with it. You aren’t bluffing. But the other spaces should be finishing up around now. Tres España now has a reason to criticize England, so why don’t you fall back?”

“Wait,” cut in Drake again. “Are you saying I lost?”

“You allowed Tres España to demonstrate their stance through strength. That’s how these duels are supposed to work.” Grace smiled. “I understand that Tres España truly isn’t going to let us escape. England will have to be careful in our

future negotiations. Giving you a poor reception would prompt immediate action from you.”

“Testament. If you understand that, I have accomplished plenty here.”

Gin nodded and took a step back.

Glowing pieces of words rose into the sky from the ground and in between the surrounding crowd. Grace looked up at them and spoke.

“Our intrusion and the absence of the Technohexen have caused it to come apart.” She somewhat raised her eyebrows and smiled. “I wonder what other stages have anything worth seeing? I think the only ones left are Hatton vs. Musashi’s vice president and Walsingham vs. the silver wolf.”

She laughed and rested the giant oar on her shoulder.

“There was a flashy explosion from Hatton’s area in front of Westminster Abbey. We’re all getting so worked up for such silly reasons.”

Westminster Abbey was located a bit southwest of central London and the area in front of it was filled with rising smoke.

After the white light and the smoke dispersed and after several rings of light appeared and vanished, the skeleton Lord Chancellor could be seen through a thin mist of light. Lord Chancellor Christopher Hatton ended his explosion pose and straightened up once more.

“Testament. Please give a prayer for the soul of Miss Honda, vice president of Musashi, who was executed for the crime of perversion.”

As he prayed toward the sky, light from between the clouds shined on him.

The spectators applauded while the many spears were removed from the explosion site.

“...?”

But a figure stood up at the edge of the grass torn up by the blast and therefore just outside the range of the blast. Hatton's empty eye sockets saw the black-haired figure almost trip as she ran.

“That is...”

It was Masazumi.

“...the one condemned for perversion!”

By the fifth step, Masazumi felt strength return to her knees. By the seventh, she felt air fill her lungs.

She was still alive. She had managed to escape at the instant of the explosion.

...I-I'm glad I was wearing the coat of a boy's uniform!

She had disconnected her coat from the neck hard points and removed the coat the instant before the spears hit. More accurately, she had fallen to a sitting position to remove her body from it.

Not only had it been a bit large for her, but as a boys' coat, it had light armor on the inside. If Hatton had not been holding her through the armor, she would not have been able to remove her arms.

Her upper body was now covered only by the girls' suit and the added sleeves, so she felt vulnerable.

But when she thought about it seriously...

...This might be the first time I've ever been thankful I have no breasts.

Asama or the Aoi sister would have been unable to remove the coat and died.
Cause of death: giant breasts.

She considered showing this off as a hidden talent at the student council's end-of-the-year party, but she thought the others might get overly considerate since it was a self-deprecating joke. At any rate, she continued running while fully aware she was already out of breath.

"Where should I go?" she muttered.

She suddenly heard something scraping at the sky and the multiple indefinite noises were drawing closer.

"Spears!?"

She glanced up in the air while running and saw several skinny shapes seemingly trying to bite at her head. She was not a fighter, so she did not know how to avoid them. She at least knew they would all hit her on her current path, so she veered hard to the left.

"...!"

The thrown spears slipped by her side, her neck, and between her running legs. She let out a reflexive shriek and took a large leap for her next step.

A moment later, wind fell in the spot her back had been in and it struck the ground next to her right heel.

Thinking the sound of the blade stabbing into the dirt was the sound of flesh being struck, she ran on.

But then she heard a new sound from behind.

"Hatton!?"

"You're dead on!!"

Hatton slid forward through the air without moving his legs. He moved quite quickly, so Masazumi gathered strength in her legs.

...Where do I go!?

She was unfamiliar with the land, she could not contact the others, and...

...Why am I surrounded by an audience like this!?

The term “audience” brought forth a certain memory which gave her the answer.

“A theatre stage.”

She had seen Shakespeare’s spell when the girl had cast her curse on Neshinbara.

Then, she thought. How do I break free of this situation?

She might have a chance if she could use a spell, but her Mouse was not leaving the hard point at her neck.

...And I haven’t made a spell contract.

She subconsciously touched the neck hard point on the right and felt something strange.

The slender furry softness was the baby anteater’s tail, but the bottom of it was warm and wet.

...Blood!?

As soon as she felt the warm wetness, she tensed up. Her running grew stiff and the vibration of her feet hitting the ground shook her entire body.

But the Mouse at her neck bothered her. She looked down and saw that the center of the right hard point was broken and the long tail was dangling down from the front opening.

The Mouse did not appear to be dead, but it was not moving. The damp feeling on her hand was only a virtual representation, so the red color on her fingers quickly turned to light and vanished into the air. However, the Mouse was also a

representative object, so it was definitely injured. The previous spears had likely done it.

“...Kh.”

If she had brought the Mouse out without being overly concerned, things might have turned out differently.

And when she had avoided the spears, she had completely forgotten the Mouse was even there. Being attacked was perfectly normal for a battle. If she was bringing something into battle with her, it was her responsibility.

“...”

She began truly worrying about someone other than herself for the first time in a while. She belatedly realized she had something she needed to protect from harm and the weight of that responsibility caused her knees to tremble a bit.

“...!”

She looked behind her and saw Hatton open one of the books that had been hanging down from either side of his waist. The thick book he held now was titled “Attendance Sheet of the Condemned”. He slowly opened to a certain page.

“Year 63 Class 3! All rise...for death!!”

His words caused a change in front of her. A group of dirt-covered skeletons burst up through the ground, raised rusty spears, and let out a shout.

“Here!!”

Thirteen skeletons were raising both their hands. They leaped up with the same force as their raised hands and launched a counter-attack toward Masazumi.

...*Oh, no.*

She had no speed and she did not have the time to get a good grip with her feet for a jump. And any intense movement could send the Mouse tumbling out of the neck hard point.

“Dammit!”

She tried to cover her neck but still chose to evade. She wanted to live.

...Come to think of it...

Wanting to live was completely natural, but she wondered how long it had been since she had thought that. At the same time, a bundle of spear tips were thrust her way.

Hatton and the thirteen Living Bones checked the result of their spear attack.

Their spear tips had definitely reached the location of their target.

But...

“She’s gone!”

No longer moving, Hatton could not see Masazumi anywhere on the lawn.

Why? he wondered. Her Mouse was injured and she looked worried about its possible death!

One might point out that Mouse injuries were common in battle, but she was a politician. The injury of the Mouse she was to protect had to have been quite a shock. It was a naïve attitude in a battle, but it said a lot about her as a human being.

“Her attitude toward her Mouse cancels out the crime of perversion! No death!”

All the Living Bones raised their arms and cheered in agreement. As those cries washed over him, Hatton began to wonder where the vice president had disappeared to.

“...?”

He then noticed something in the ground where she had been.

...An arrow!

The Far Eastern arrow was lacquered white and it stabbed vertically into the dirt.

Masazumi did not know what had happened to her. She only knew one thing for sure.

...I'm not dead?

Given the situation, she could not imagine how she could be alive. She had been skewered with spears while standing in place.

...I could see a military commander dying that way, but it's a little out of place for a political commander.

But now she had collapsed forward and not a single spear had stabbed into her.

Not only that...

“What is this cushion?”

She sat up a bit and found breasts in front of her. Asama was lying there, so her breasts must have been the cushion.

...A cushion sommelier like Mukai would call this a lovely cushion. No, I shouldn't think of them as separate things. Asama is a part of this cushion. Or is it the other way around? My thoughts are all jumbled up.

She observed her surroundings even more and found that Asama was unconscious and she was lying on top of Asama.

...I-I'm glad Naruze isn't here to see this! But how did this happen!?

She further realized that it looked like she had pushed Asama down, mounted her, and removed her own coat.

“W-wait!”

She looked around, but no one else was there. She was afraid it was part of a hidden camera show, but a purifying type like Asama would not take part in something like that.

The two of them were alone, she had pushed down a girl, and that girl was showing no sign of resisting. What was the proper action at a time like that?

“...”

Calm down, thought Masazumi. I need to know what happened before taking any kind of action. Just a moment ago, I was being preached to by a corpse and blown up during a sports festival. How did that lead to mounting a classmate?

She looked down at Asama again.

...Talk about huge.

She was referring to her height.

Her height and willingness to help gave Asama a motherly position in the class, but why was Masazumi alone with her in this empty world?

...It can't be...

“Don't tell me I was summoned to another world as a hero.”

It was a common story in novels or comics. A person who was unremarkable in the real world would be summoned to another world and save that world with a newly-discovered mysterious power.

...As a shrine maiden, Asama could play the role of the summoner, but then what's my special ability? My chest!? Is it my chest!? But that's the same plot as the Flat Chronicles.

“Nn...”

Asama frowned and squirmed below her.

Asama took in a breath and opened her eyes slightly. While feeling the girl's warm breath, Masazumi saw the two colors of her unfocused eyes come into view.

...Why isn't she dating anyone when she has so much charm? It's probably due to the poor environment of our class, so I shouldn't think about it too much. But people are easily influenced by their surroundings. If everyone around her is like that, wouldn't she...? No, I need to stop thinking about this. But if that is the case, won't it start affecting me before long? No, no. I need to stop... Actually maybe I should think about that one. Or shouldn't I? Which is it?

At any rate, Masazumi sat up. The motion caused strength to enter Asama's eyes and she noticed Masazumi. She was still lying down, but an exhausted smile appeared through her disheveled hair.

“Ah... That went well, Masazumi.”

...Huh? Has it been a while since I pushed her down? Did we already finish?

She tried to decide if losing her memory of that was a bad thing, but then Asama placed a hand on the back of her head and sat up. Masazumi was sitting on her thighs, so this brought their faces close and Masazumi could smell her hair.

“A-are you okay?”

“Oh, yes. I just happened to be standing right in front of you when I rescued you.”

...In front of me?

She then realized where they were.

...This is the plaza in front of Westminster Abbey.

She had not noticed because the abbey was to her back, but that was definitely where they were. However, the people were gone and none of the spears remained. Asama explained why.

“To put it simply, this is similar to a harmonic territory. You were in the theatre space created by Shakespeare and this is like the entrance that exists between reality and the theatre space.”

This mostly matched Masazumi’s guesses on the battlefield.

“So you saved me?”

“Were you about to win or something?”

“No, I-... Ah.”

She suddenly remembered the Mouse at her neck. Asama noticed her looking down.

“Please stay still. If it has not left its nest, I can handle it.”

Its “nest” likely referred to the hard point part. A gentle breeze blew Asama’s hair and the hair tickled Masazumi’s right cheek. The shrine maiden’s fingers reached around behind her neck to the hard point parts on either side. She was essentially embracing Masazumi and her cushion pressed up against Masazumi’s coatless chest.

...N-no strange internal monologues. Resist.

But, she thought. When my mother would face me to heal wounds, cut my nails, or cut my hair, we had this same kind of height difference.

A few sign frames appeared from the left part at her neck. As Asama manipulated them and Hanami supported the Mouse's tail, a few glowing torii-shaped objects spilled from that tail. Asama placed them inside the left hard point part and Hanami rotated once.

“Clap!”

Masazumi looked down and saw the anteater was contained in a box made from six bluish-white torii. The torii on the side said “healing in progress”, so the box must have been a healing spell.

Asama breathed a sigh of relief, moved away from Masazumi, and held the torii box out toward her.

“If it had been brought out after the injury, it would probably have been destroyed, but you made sure it didn't fall out, didn't you? If you care for it that much, you will make an excellent owner. It has been stabilized inside the box, so you can use external approaches now. Please wrap some bandages around it.”

The Mouse felt soft and warm as Masazumi took it. She could feel the shape of the box, but she could also feel the Mouse through the box. The baby anteater seemed to be sleeping and the blood had vanished. With the blood gone, the wound at the throat was visible.

Seeing the frown on her face, Asama frantically spoke up.

“Um... Should I add an Amaterasu-style spell so you can't see the wound? If you don't like the God Mosaic, you can choose the God Flash. Or if you ask the god, you can also get the God Steam or the God Inkblot.”

“Why are there so many options?”

As she muttered absentmindedly, she removed the left pocket binder from waist and placed the anteater inside it. She gently held the pocket binder and Asama nodded and smiled bitterly.

“Masazumi, um...”

Masazumi recalled she was sitting on the other girl’s thighs.

“S-sorry. I panicked and it slipped my mind.”

Masazumi hurriedly moved away and felt her face redden.

“U-um, what should we do now?” she asked to hide her embarrassment. “Were you alone?”

“No, I was with Kimi. I came for you and she went elsewhere. I could only put together enough spells to bring two people out of this theatre space, so the others will have to do their best on their own. I’m sorry I couldn’t do more.”

“Don’t feel sorry,” said Masazumi.

The successor to Musashi’s primary shrine had only been able to create enough for two people. That showed just how powerful the enemy’s spell was and how skilled Asama was.

She understood why Asama had come for her.

...I’m the vice president.

Only a student could challenge another student, but to challenge the student council or chancellor’s officers, one needed an equivalent position or to have won the right.

...These duels were likely set up to win that right.

By defeating a member of Musashi's student council or chancellor's officers, they would win the right to challenge Aoi. Elizabeth or the other higher-ranking members were not taking part because England could pass it off as the misconduct of their subordinates if it failed.

"I'm not a fighter, so I was in the most danger."

Just because it was a festival, she should not have been wandering around on her own.

But Asama spoke as she stood up.

"I was able to save you right away because of your Mouse. When it was injured, its primary spell sent out a rescue signal. That gave me your exact location, so I was able to safely activate the spell to remove you from the space."

"I see," she muttered while realizing the meaning of the light weight in her arms. "I need to thank it."

"You're surprisingly nice, Masazumi."

...Does the fact that I'm surprised to hear that mean I don't know myself very well? I always thought I was harsh on others. Well, maybe that was just flattery.

"How large is this space?"

"It doesn't seem to have Oxford on the first level. There's something like a wall there that repels any attempt to move through it. That means Suzu-san, Adele, and Futayo shouldn't have been affected."

"But they might have run into trouble separate from this?"

"If someone defeats Futayo, they will gain the undisputable right to challenge a position higher than vice chancellor. But she is vice chancellor. As England hasn't sent out anyone on the same level, that makes her the strongest one involved."

So...

“Let’s head toward the City. Toori-kun and Horizon are there and the others should gather there as well.”

“Is someone fighting there?”

“Yes.” Asama turned her back, looked over her shoulder, and pointed toward the City. “Nate went in that direction. As a knight, she feels it is her duty to protect Horizon and Toori-kun.”

Chapter 37: Protector of the Plaza

CHAPTER 37

"Protector of the Plaza"



Why do people
Force unwanted things on each other?
Point Allocation (Duty)

Why do people

Force unwanted things on each other?

Point Allocation (Duty)

Mitotsudaira fought in the plaza.

The automaton named Walsingham deflected the silver chains Mitotsudaira sent toward her, so Mitotsudaira drew back two of the rejected chains and ordered two to continue attacking.

She did not have the attacking two wrap around. They instead grabbed broken pieces of wooden festival stands and used them as spears to directly stab Walsingham.

While the other two returned to Mitotsudaira, one of them grabbed and threw one of the stands surrounding the fountain. The other tore up and threw one of the stones around the fountain.

Meanwhile, Mitotsudaira herself fell back and circled the plaza that filled with water spray as the fountain water spilled out.

But Walsingham pursued her. She used her 120 blades to slice away the wooden spears thrust forward by the attacking chains. To stop the thrown stand, she smashed it with a swing of her left and right cross swords.

After sweeping away the stand, the cross swords combined and the barrel attached.

“Bite!”

She fired.

It was not as powerful as a siege canon, but the ether blast was enough to shoot through a house.

It fired in a straight line with no tracking ability, so its path could be predicted from the orientation of the barrel, but a direct shot for the center of the chest was still difficult to avoid. Mitotsudaira successfully avoided it by turning to the side, but her feet fell out of place and the pull of the chains destroyed her balance.

“Go!”

Walsingham ran forward with her long hair waving behind her like a tail.

They could both attack and defend at the same time, but Mitotsudaira felt somewhat impatient.

...I need to hurry.

After all, some enemy could have already gained the right to challenge the chancellor and could already be on the way there.

Allowing that would be a disgrace as a knight.

The Mitotsudaira family may have been new to Musashi, but it had more authority than any of the other families.

If she allowed an enemy to approach the chancellor here, she would be criticized.

...And by myself more than anyone.

She was still in battle, so she lightly pulled back her chin instead of using her hands.

She wore a small black choker on her neck. It was quite old.

After feeling the hard material against her skin, she checked where in the plaza she was.

“I’ve made three circuits.”

She took a large jump back and raised her right arm toward the fountain.

“Then it’s time!!”

After smashing the 18th festival stand, Walsingham decided her victory was nigh.

The enemy had just thrown the last stand from the plaza and all of the benches had been used.

With those primary weapons used up, the enemy only had the chains and stones, but Walsingham could deflect both of those.

Thus she would win. Meanwhile, she prepared to slice horizontally through the final stand falling from the sky.

“...!!”

She smashed it.

Her sight devices viewed her opponent through the scattering stand fragments.

The first step was to fire her cannon. That would cause her opponent to evade and she could use that moment to charge in.

Walsingham connected the cross swords as if folding her hands in prayer and she passed the barrel through.

“Bi-...”

But she paused at the last second.

The reason for this was simple: there was a fountain overhead.

“!?”

Walsingham expressionlessly yet questioningly looked up at the stones that had surrounded the fountain.

The construction was about twenty meters across and it whistled through the wind as it slammed down from the sky.

When had the enemy prepared this?

Walsingham could only assume she had prepared the silver chains inside the water filling the area below their feet. The water flooding the plaza had been no accident. It had been to hide the destruction of the joints with the base.

Walsingham had to evade.

No matter how large the structure, it was no threat as long as it did not hit.

However, the water overflowing from the fountain to her left reached her feet and grabbed at her legs.

That left only one option: Abandon her knees on down and evade.

After leaving the bottoms of her legs behind, she tried to move left and away from the fountain.

But then she saw a stone. Mitotsudaira had thrown it from straight in front of her.

Instead of aiming for her head, it flew toward her escape path. Mitotsudaira had predicted her evasion and thrown the stone to stop her.

With her evasion cut off, Walsingham made a new decision.

Her only option was to destroy the stone structure falling from above.

The falling ring of stone tilted vertically and dropped toward her like a roller.

Walsingham's sight devices accurately read the stone ring's motion and structure. She targeted the gaps between stones using the cross sword cannon.

She fired and the white ether cannon tore into its target. The recoil was bad enough, but the sound of the blast as it echoed from the target was enough to

shake her auditory devices to their core. The ripples in the water below turned into spray and she saw the blast hit the exact spot she had targeted.

But the stone structure did not break.

It cracked, but another shot was necessary.

She completely connected the cross swords to turn the cannon into a cross spear. She placed the bottom of the shaft on the ground like a pike and she made sure the stone structure would fall on the tip of the cross swords.

The target's own weight would do the rest.

“Go!!”

The cannon bent and the joints twisted to the point of almost breaking.

“Yes!”

But the cross spear stabbed deep into the stone structure.

The extremely heavy stone ring split in midair.

The cracks in the stone structure opened just as the cannon broke. The splitting of the stone created a tremendous noise.

Walsingham stuck her hands between the pressed-together cross swords as if opening a large door.

“Rock up!!”

And she pulled them apart. The blades of the cross swords were inside the widened crack, so this split the stone structure in two along that crack.

The breaking stone created a harmony of solid noises and a hail of stone and other building materials scattered through the air.

But Walsingham saw her enemy attack beyond it all. Two silver chains slipped in amidst the scattering stone.

“Gundog!”

She deflected the two high-speed attacks with sixty blades, but those were not the enemy’s only attacks.

Walsingham spotted the two remaining silver chains.

Mitotsudaira had launched them from her arms and into the water covering the ground.

“!?”

The water at their feet was already about twenty centimeters deep. The spraying water and falling stone stirred up that water, so the underwater area could not be seen clearly. The instant Walsingham frowned toward that water, two silver lights shot up from the water on either side.

She just barely managed to react to the water that leaped up as sharply as a spear. Her cross swords were held out to either side, so she rotated them forwards and upwards as if to close them. A metallic noise rang out.

“La!”

The silver chains were knocked upwards.

All four chains had now been deflected and the enemy was left defenseless.

Walsingham returned the two cross swords to her sides and leaned forward in preparation to dash. She would chase down the silver wolf along with her blades.

But then she noticed the state of the two silver chains that had shot up from the water.

Those neutralized chains had an odd shape. The front seemed to hold a spear-like weapon, but the chains had simply bent and twisted around into that form.

That was not the end of the chains. The middle of the chains had simply made themselves look like spears.

Then where were the actual ends?

They would still be in the water.

“...!?”

Mitotsudaira silently launched the silver chains.

The launchers were the ends of the two chains hidden below the water and their target was Walsingham's back.

The weapons were wooden spears and they were launched such that they would pierce Walsingham's uniform. Even if this would not smash her body, an attack piercing through her clothes from back to front would interfere with her movement. The two silver chains were located about two meters apart and they attacked at different angles. Even if the automaton did turn around, one or the other of them would hit her from outside her field of vision.

If Mitotsudaira fired, she would hit.

But in that moment, she heard an unfamiliar noise.

...A mechanical noise?

It was the sound of Walsingham's arms quickly flying behind her, but the automaton had not looked back. She was still facing Mitotsudaira.

Nevertheless, the two arms intercepted the two wooden spears.

“Get!”

Walsingham grabbed the wooden spears with the joint-less arms.

Why? asked Mitotsudaira.

That attack from behind should have been a complete surprise. With the gap in location, it should have been impossible to avoid.

...How did she know their location so accurately without looking!?

There was a reason for her confusion.

...She visually checked overhead earlier!

When Mitotsudaira had dropped the first festival stand, Walsingham had looked up, seen it, and then dealt with it. The process had been the same with the stone structure just now. The automaton's vision was forward-facing and she observed her surroundings on that basis.

...So how did she react to that attack from behind!?

She did not understand. It was a complete surprise for the automaton to react only to something behind her.

“La la la la la la!”

Walsingham's blades reacted to her words. They flew toward the two silver chains submerged in the water.

With 48 blades on either side, they stabbed into those chains from above. Each link of the chain was hit accurately and held deep against the ground. She had stopped the chains by stitching them to the ground. Mitotsudaira was connected to the base of those chains, so her range of actions was now restricted.

“Kh!”

She attempted to pull them out, but something stopped her.

A few small objects fell from the sky.

She looked up and saw the bright color of the falling objects.

“Lemons!?”

Mitotsudaira watched the many lemons fall down from overhead. The yellow elliptical fruits had been sold at one of the plaza’s stands.

At the beginning of the duel, she had sensed danger and crushed that fruit stand first.

She had prioritized the fruit stand for one reason: a wolf’s sense of smell was strong.

She noticed the falling lemons all had Walsingham’s blades skewering them and there were 24 of them in all. While holding down the two silver chains, Walsingham must have carried these into the air and dropped them. The instant after Mitotsudaira noticed the falling scattering of yellow, the blades moved.

“...!”

The lemons split open, yellow fruit flesh scattered, the juices sprayed out, and it audibly formed a mist.

...!!

Mitotsudaira felt a tearing pain spread from her nose to her mouth and from the inner corner of her eyes to the back of her head.

This was the irritating odor of citrus.

A wolf’s sense of smell was equal to a dog’s and ten thousand times as sensitive as a human’s. The same went for a member of a werewolf family like Mitotsudaira. It could come in handy for the mixing and selling of perfumes, but

it meant she had to avoid sharp and irritating smells. She had an especially hard time with the smell of citrus fruits.

Not even humans liked the undiluted smell and it hit her senses with ten thousand times the concentration. The itching and piercing pain was too raw to call “stabbing” and it seemed to squeeze at every nerve in her body.

Her sense of smell numbed over in an instant, but her body’s rejection caused all of her senses to cry out in pain.

“Kah!!”

...Oh, no!

Her vision blurred with tears, a powerful ringing filled her ears, and a cramping heat filled the back of her mouth.

Her footing grew unsteady and she could not tell if she was even still standing, but her sense of touch grew sharper.

As soon as she started emptying her mind of all thoughts, a piece of cut lemon fell on her shoulder.

That light impact produced a shudder of rejection. She attempted to raise her arms, but the chains were still held motionless below the water. She lost control over the two in the air and they fell powerlessly down.

She was currently bound to the waterside by the two chains and her body would not stop trembling.

She shook her head in frustration, let everything spill out that would, and coughed repeatedly as if about to vomit, but none of it solved anything.

That was when Walsingham charged in with 24 blades ahead of her.

The silver chains falling from the sky reacted to the blades targeting her body and face. They acted autonomously to protect their master. They moved slowly, but they did indeed move.

They could manage nothing more than the bare minimum.

One used the center of the chain to grab a stone fragment from its master's waist pocket and threw it.

That stone saved Mitotsudaira's life by deflecting the blade flying straight toward her face.

A moment later, strength suddenly returned to her gaze, but not just because of the harsh noise of blade against stone.

“My king!?”

That stone was the one her king had sat on.

Her powerful sense of smell awakened as it sought that relief to overcome the previous scent of rejection.

“...!!”

With a single shake of the head, she knocked away the tears and reactivated.

But...

“Too too too too late, you tamed wolf.”

With those words, the remaining 23 blades stabbed into every part of Mitotsudaira's body.

“...!!”

Mitotsudaira felt more heat than pain.

She had twisted her body to prevent a direct hit to her heart or gut, but that had increased the heat around her collarbone and thighs. She felt a weight pressing down on her from all over and the chains on her arms were stretched taut.

She could see the blades stabbing into her and blood was already leaking out between some of the blades and her skin. That meant her nerves had been severed. After an instant of delay, pain reached every part of her body and it did not stop.

The pain of having her body torn apart came from 23 different parts of her body.

The blades had no barbs, but they were small enough to not fall out under their own weight. Instead, Walsingham used her gravitational control.

“Nn!!”

Another strike reached all 23 areas as if hammering them in and out the other side.

Mitotsudaira gasped in pain, arched her back, and thought.

...I have to move!

She could not move her body, so she moved her hands despite the blades stabbing into them.

...Silver chains!

Mitotsudaira launched her primary weapon toward Walsingham who charged forward with her arms still behind her.

She swung up the two silver chains that flew weakly through the air and then swung down the tight arms at the end of the chains.

The metal fists countered Walsingham's charge.

“Bite!”

But before they arrived, heat gouged into every part of her body. It was obvious what had happened: all of the blades inside her body had been forcibly removed, some of them ripping through flesh along the way.

“...!!”

The silver chains in the air intercepted, a sound of impact reached Mitotsudaira's ears, and the two chains were deflected. That left the two in the water. At the moment, Walsingham was controlling all the many blades, the cross swords, and herself. While controlling so much, her gravitational control would be weaker than Mitotsudaira's physical strength.

Mitotsudaira pulled on the submerged chains and tried as hard as she could to return them to her.

But before she could, Walsingham slammed her two primary weapons into the water.

She had brought the twin cross swords up high and then swung them down like driving a stake into the ground.

...It can't be...

The cross swords hammered down on every single one of the blades holding the chains to the ground.

This caused the blades to dig deep into the holes of the chains.

“Silver chains!?”

Before she could even shout out, silver fragments burst up through the surface.

Two of the silver chains had been severed and smashed.

Two silver chains had been destroyed.

That fact brought Mitotsudaira's movement to a stop.

Meanwhile, the 96 unharmed blades rose wet from the water and turned their tips toward her.

“Go, gundog!”

They raced through the air.

The ends of the severed chains had lost all strength. The tight arms that had been using wooden spears to struggle against Walsingham's arms let those wooden spears slip down.

“Bite.”

The quickly spinning cross swords smashed them.

Two of the four silver chains were lost and the remaining two had been deflected into the air. Walsingham would arrive before the surviving two returned.

Mitotsudaira's primary weapons had been halved in number and the remaining ones were unusable. More blood flowed from her body and strength began to leave her. The entire situation caused her to hesitate for a moment, but she quickly came to a certain decision.

...I mustn't think about this!

Most likely, thinking would only bring unpleasant thoughts. She had enough sense to know that. She was not like her horrible classmates, so growing negative here would only apply further pressure to herself.

Once Walsingham arrived within a few steps, something passed by over her shoulders.

They were arms. With the silver chains dealt with, the two arms spread their hands and grabbed Mitotsudaira's wrists.

“!”

Blood spilled from her wrists as they were forced outwards.

Walsingham prepared to attack the center of her chest as she was held in a cross-shape.

“La.”

As if flapping nonexistent wings, she swung the cross swords from behind to bring them together. The instant they joined, they would pierce into Mitotsudaira’s chest.

Mitotsudaira determined the automaton was only three steps away. The combination of the swords would complete at the second step and the finishing blow would be dealt a step after that. A glance showed a great number of blades approaching from behind.

As soon as the deadly attack struck, those blades would crucify her.

Due to the histories of the two countries, England would not hesitate to execute a French non-human.

But, thought Mitotsudaira. I can still move.

She was soaked with blood and her mind was still shaking from the citrus, but there was one thing she could still move.

“Silver chains!!”

The silver chains deflected into the sky had yet to adjust from the impact, but that only applied to the parts that had been deflected. The portion at the base was still usable, so Mitotsudaira made a certain decision.

“Release two!”

The two chains at her waist that had been broken in the water were abandoned along with the obelisks at her waist and that portion of her skirt.

With only the two at her shoulders remaining, Mitotsudaira quickly pulled the chains from the supply device and manipulated them.

...Around me!

The portion she pulled out wrapped around her own arms and legs and she poured all her strength into the palms controlling them.

“Nn!!”

She could not move her body as she wished, so she wrapped the chains around it and used them to move it. She used her fingers, grip, and will to send instructions to the chains.

“Ah!!”

She forced herself to lean forward and threw her entire body in that direction. She also wrapped the chains around Walsingham’s arms and ripped them from her wrists.

She moved forward.

“!?”

She would slip between the two cross swords and reach Walsingham past them.

The swords were closing quickly, so timing her passage between them would be difficult.

But Mitotsudaira did not care.

Just before the swords closed, she used the chains to turn her body ninety degrees to the left and raise her arms.

...I can make it through!

Her thin body shot by in a straight line. The closing swords grazed her slightly, but she still made it between them.

...Tomo or Kimi would never have made it through there!! Masazumi would be about the only other one who could pull it off.

While calmly analyzing her technique, she faced forward and found Walsingham's widened eyes.

Everything slowed down yet felt sped up. She heard the swords close behind her.

"Bite," muttered Mitotsudaira as she slammed into Walsingham's body with her right shoulder.

She continued pushing against the automaton with the entirety of her momentum.

She moved forward as if grabbing and shoving her. Her speed remained strong and she travelled toward the area behind Walsingham. Countless blades waited there in preparation to crucify her.

Musashi's knight charged toward those blades and her blood-soaked sprint would grant her wish.

"...!!"

In her fading consciousness, Mitotsudaira saw the blades begin to evade while Walsingham continued looking directly at her.

The enemy had not looked behind her, but the blades behind her had accurately avoided her.

Walsingham could see behind her.

As Mitotsudaira wondered why, a certain possibility occurred to her. And if that possibility was true...

...This attack won't knock her into the blades!

Convinced her guess was correct, she took a certain action.

She leaned forward as if tackling and slammed the two of them into the water.

Her arms were squeezing Walsingham's clothes more than her actual body, but it was enough to keep the automaton from escaping.

“Silver chains! Wrap around both of us!”

With that shout, Mitotsudaira held down the doll as if slamming her into the ground.

They sank.

Water wrapped around her body and the sound vanished from her surroundings. She could not breathe, but she did not care.

Convinced this would be her final decision in the battle, she sent one last instruction to the silver chains.

...Embrace the doll with all your might!

She would squeeze her until she broke. Her own body tightened and the doll below her chest began to creak. While listening to that sound and feeling her consciousness fade due to oxygen deprivation, Mitotsudaira smiled.

...Honestly. Will this at least slightly make up for ten years ago?

As she sank into the water with no air to breathe, she passed out as if falling asleep. She could smell her own blood in the water, but she had another thought before completely passing out.

...Was I of some use to you?

And...

...I'll be really mad if the two of you don't have a proper date after all this.

Chapter 38: Users of the Plaza

CHAPTER 38

"Users of the Plaza"



What is it one must know
In order to come to a realization?
Point Allocation (Decision)

What is it one must know

In order to come to a realization?

Point Allocation (Decision)

A stone plaza had a fountain in the center, was surrounded by tall buildings, and connected major roads.

Two people sat on the stone structure surrounding the fountain. One was a boy and the other a girl. The girl was a silver-haired automaton wearing a sleeveless English uniform and a feathered hat. The boy wore a black Far Eastern uniform.

The girl looked toward the festival stands surrounding the plaza.

“What do we do now that we have gone around and seen the center of the city, Toori-sama?”

“Judge. Listen carefully, Horizon. According to sis’s manual, I sit next to you like this, nonchalantly put my arm around your shoulder, and whisper something to put you in the mood!”

Horizon placed her elbow on Toori’s shoulder and stared at him with half-lidded eyes.

“The arm on the shoulder? You mean like this? ...Well, Toori-sama? Is this fun? What mood has it put you in?”

“D-dammit. This is what you call the mood of a loser!”

Toori went on to pull the B5 size parchment of the date manual from his pocket and tilted his head.

“Strange. According to sis’s instructions, we should’ve kissed liked three times by now.”

“To be honest, I suspect Kimi-sama’s strategy is accurate and it is the application of that strategy that has failed. For example, it says here to ‘show off your good side at the live ammunition shooting range and increase her appreciation of you’, but a certain idiot could not hit any of the targets, peered down the barrel while wondering aloud if the gun actually had any bullets in it, and caused even the game runner to flee. Everyone thought you were committing suicide after doing so poorly at the game.”

“Huh? I thought they all loved the gag. The game runner even gave me a stuffed doll. Look, it’s the messy-eating version of Reddy the Evil Fairy Teletub.”

“I am amazed they recreated those fairies from the records found in some ruins. There is truly great depth to England.”

“Anyway,” said Toori as he checked the manual and the notes the girls had given him.

Unfortunately, most of those notes were honest advice along the lines of “do anything weird and I’ll punish you”.

He leaned back in thought, took a deep breath, and turned toward Horizon.

“With no tsukkomi or other intrusions, I’ve got a pretty good advantage here, don’t you think?”

“Judge. This means there is nothing to soften my blows and no one you can flee to. It takes a lot of naïveté to see that and think it gives you an advantage.”

“Huh? So to you...”

Toori started asking his question, scratched his head, and continued a bit awkwardly.

“To you, everyone’s *my* ally?”

Horizon responded quietly to Toori’s question.

“I have not been around them long enough to divide them into the category of ally. But at the moment, the only ones I have confirmed to be my friends are the brown algae creatures and Masazumi-sama.”

“What about my sis?”

“Kimi-sama has large breasts and is one of my caretakers. Although my #1 caretaker would be the shop owner.”

“I see.” Toori nodded and continued. “What about our teacher?”

“Judge. She has large breasts and is a teacher who loves meat.”

“Asama?”

“Judge. She has large breasts and is a shrine maiden who likes shooting people.”

“You’re right on all counts, so why do I feel like I’m gonna have people mad at me later? ...And why do you use breasts as the first criterion?”

“Judge. That is a standard theorem of the universe,” declared the automaton.

“Listen. This is a very difficult concept. After all, Greek philosopher and mathematician Archimedes sought a formula to find the shape of beautiful breasts, but a great theorem of the universe would never produce a number mere humans can fully understand. Nevertheless, Archimedes found a tentative formula and named it pi. The people were so impressed that a custom was born of repeating ‘Oh! Pi! Oh! Pi!’ again and again. Thus whenever someone speaks of breasts^[1] they are touching on a great truth and mystery of the universe. By the way, this will be on the test.”

“Nwohhh! The joke ended before I could get a word in edgewise!”

Toori began cursing and punching the stone structure on the opposite side from her, but seemed satisfied as soon as he expressed his regret like that.

“Anyway,” he said. “Wh-who do you say has the biggest chest in the class?”

“Are you planning to grope their chest?”

“Yeah!” he immediately replied.

“That would clearly be Persona-kun,” she replied calmly. “And I will not forgive you until you grope his chest.”

“I-I walked right into that one! Right into it!”

But the idiot quickly recovered and asked another question.

“Wh-what about Shiro?”

“Judge. He has small breasts and-...”

“Y-you use that for the guys too!? Of course he’s got small breasts! With that logic, I’ve got a flat chest!”

“Judge. But there are well-endowed males such as Ohiroshiki-sama, so any decision about this must be made strictly and carefully. To continue my description of Bertoni-sama, he is also a stingy money-lover.”

“Yeah, you won’t find any argument on that one. So, um...what about Tenzou?”

“Who?”

“Th-that’s just mean! Or is it a compliment since he’s a ninja!?”

Toori continued asking for Horizon’s opinions of people and eventually came across a certain individual.

“What about Bell-san?”

“Judge. She has fairly small breasts and no ability to see, but she works hard to ensure it is not a problem. Oh, but it is not the small breasts part I am saying could be a problem. The same goes for Adele-sama.”

“Th-that subdued kind of cruelty is making me shudder, Horizon! So do you ever want to take Bell-san’s hand and help her out?”

“Judge. The desire to help people is natural for automatons.”

Toori smiled when he heard that and Horizon frowned.

“Why are you smiling? I do not understand.”

“I just realized again that you’re really Horizon.”

“Judge. Logically speaking, I cannot be anything other than that. But, Toori-sama.” Horizon asked a question. “What has caused that expression that I will call a ‘slight smile’ based on previous patterns?”

“It makes me smile that you’re Horizon. Is that not enough?” Toori continued smiling. “It’s the same as eating.”

Horizon tilted her head and then gave an extra tilt of the head.

“Eating? Once you eat something, it disappears.” She stood up, looked around at the surrounding festival stands, and nodded toward Toori. “This festival will not last forever either. It will end and then disappear. ...In fact, I can determine that there is nothing that does not end. In the same way, even the closest of friends will grow estranged once distance is put between them from graduation or moving to a new home.

“And in those and all other things, losing them will only bring sorrow. What purpose is there in obtaining, doing, and participating in those things? I do not wish to feel sad, so the best option is to live a reliable life day in and day out. If I associate with the bare minimum of people and obtain the bare minimum of meaning in my life, isn’t that enough?”

She took a breath.

“Toori-sama, you stated that you wish for me to gain an interest in my emotions, but emotions are produced by an object or existence. They are based on the assumption that you will hold a relationship to something else. Sorrow, for

example, is produced upon the loss of such a relationship. All relationships will be lost in the end, so it is unavoidable. In that case...”

In that case...

“I see no need for these ‘emotions’ that are needed to hold a relationship with something. Holding a relationship with someone or something will eventually bring the sorrow of parting. I do not wish to experience sorrow, so I will reject all else as well. I will reject my other emotions as well as my relationships with people or things. What do you say to that?” she asked. “If it will be lost and bring sorrow in the end, is there any meaning in possessing the other emotions and the relationships needed to feel those emotions?”

Horizon asked her question.

“Toori-sama, I have heard you almost lost me once and I can guess that you felt the emotion of sorrow at that time, so what about this?”

She asked.

“If you are with me, you will eventually lose me again and feel sorrow. Do you still wish for a relationship with me despite that?”

She turned toward Toori, but he was no longer on the stone structure. Wondering where he went, she looked down and found him crouching by her right side. He seemed to be tying the stuffed doll to the right hand point at her waist.

“Please stop. I do not need that.”

“Why not?”

“I will eventually lose it and it is not necessary for my daily life, so I do not need it.”

“Tch. If you just said you didn’t need things you’ll eventually lose, I was gonna negotiate you out of those clothes you’ll eventually lose.”

“Is that so?”

He finished tying the doll on and he stood up and smiled at her while she felt the slight bit of unnecessary weight.

“It’s true that this’ll be covered in dust in a month even if you take it off and store it. And after a while you’d stop looking at it and might even throw it out.”

“Judge. Then what purpose is there in obtaining such a thing? Are you forcing sorrow onto me?”

“Maybe so,” said Toori. “But you’ll remember I gave you this and that you wore it even after you lose it, won’t you?”

“Judge. An automaton’s memory is perfect. Yes, during the festival preparations, you would always look up at Masazumi-sama’s butt as she climbed the ladder. A total of 23 times, was it?”

“No, it was 25 times. The 7th and 15th times you weren’t there, so- I-I’m sorry, I’m sorry, Horizon-sama. ...Huh, my memory’s pretty damn good too, isn’t it?”

“I see. So not only do you change the subject, but this is what you bring up.”

“Y-you were the one that brought it up!!”

“That is within the margin of error. ...At any rate, what meaning is there in my memory?”

“Well.” Toori scratched his head. “I’m not quite sure how to say it, but I was really down when you died way back then and I recovered pretty well thanks to sis and those other horrible people. Anyway, I realized something back then.”

Namely...

“Even without you around, I found myself thinking about what you would say or do if you had been there.”

“Meaning?”

“Judge,” said Toori. “Even if you’ve completely vanished, you’re still with me.”

Toori gave his answer.

“If I lose you, I’ll be sad. I’ve got the emotion of sorrow after all. But even as a kid, I had various types of relationships with you, I spoke with you, we touched each other, we spent time with each other, and I learned to a certain extent what kind of person you were. And because of that, I had more than just the sorrow after I lost you. Even after that, *the version of you that I knew* was still with me.”

He looked up in the air a little before continuing.

“Even as I got taller, I stayed an idiot, but the people around me got more mature. All the things the Horizon inside me could do or had wanted to do, I could do with all the others. And as we did them again and again, I started having a thought. I decided it was about time I let you go free. I’d kept the kid Horizon with me to keep me from being sad, but just as she couldn’t grow up with us, I also couldn’t change what she was for my own convenience. So once I gather the Logismoï Oplo and return them to the Horizon inside me, I decided to give my old self to you.”

“Your old self?”

Toori nodded as she asked what that meant.

“I’d place my monument next to yours and then continue on as the next me somewhere else. I wouldn’t be redoing it; I’d be continuing on. I’d make sure to say thanks to the old me and to you, but then I’d find a new person like you. ...Don’t tell anyone else,” urged Toori. “I haven’t told anyone about that part. Although there’s a good chance they’ve caught on.”

“Judge. I understand. This topic is no longer necessary.” Horizon continued. “But does that mean you are maintaining this relationship with me so that you can memorize all of my behavior patterns and thus have no problem with losing me? Are you ensuring you can create a mental replacement for me if I am lost?”

She touched the doll at her waist.

“Then it should be enough to show my reaction to each set of circumstances once and maintain the bare minimum of a relationship. And once you have gathered all of those patterns, you will be fine with me dying.”

“That isn’t it.” Toori was still smiling. “I’m not having fun with you so I’ll be fine with you dying. It’s the opposite. If we have fun, there’ll naturally be something left over even if you suddenly die.”

“But,” said Horizon. “How can I obtain the emotion of ‘fun’?”

Horizon spoke.

“The Logismoï Oplo has given me the negative emotion of sorrow. It has not given me a positive emotion. In that case, gathering the Logismoï Oplo will only provide me with negative emotions.”

In that case...

“I do not need that.”

Those direct words were accompanied by something.

“ ... ”

Tears spilled out.

In saying she did not need that, she determined that she was weak. The Logismoï Oplo were made from her emotions, but she did not want that part of herself if they were negative emotions.

She felt it was right to reject herself, yet she wondered who would need her if even she did not want herself.

“That’s why I’m bringing back your emotions, Horizon.”

“...?”

She wiped away her tears and saw him buying a few skewered roast apples from a nearby festival stand and placing them in a bag.

She took the slice he held out toward her and she placed it in her mouth to hide that she was crying.

“Is it good?”

“Judge.” She nodded and thought about how to answer his question. “It is strongly acidic, but the cooking brings out a strong sweetness as well. I have determined it falls in the category of delicious.”

“All right!”

Toori gave a thumbs-up to the old man running the stand. The man returned the thumbs-up, grinned, and pulled a fresh apple from below the stand.

“Here, if this is your first time tasting it, try one that isn’t cooked. If you like it, head to the market. Raw, they’re more suited to salads, so buy some vegetables to go with them. Also, don’t make a lady cry.”

“Sure thing.”

Toori caught the thrown apple, tapped Horizon on the shoulder, and pushed on her back so they could slowly walk across the plaza.

“Do you dislike negative emotions, Horizon?”

“Judge. Sorrow alone is painful enough.”

“Then you do have a positive emotion.”

“Why?”

“Because,” he said. “If you only had the negative emotion, you’d accept it without opposition and you’d give yourself into it. But you’re opposing it. That means you have positive emotions.”

“Then...” Horizon threw her question out to him while placing a hand on her own chest. “What are positive emotions!?”

She took a breath.

“What is the positive emotion I gained along with the emotion of sorrow?”

She received a definite answer to her question and it came as he scratched at his head.

“I don’t know that either.”

She truly considered punching him there.

Toori sensed a sort of killer intent coming from the automaton standing next to him.

She silently glaring at him as usual, but he felt this was especially bad. It was bad enough to bring an odd sweat to his back.

“Horizon? Um, uh... Horizon?”

“You do not need to say it twice. What is it? Yes, what is it?”

He tried to think up an excuse, but she said something else before he could.

“Are you saying you want to die? Is that it? Oh? Is that sweat on your brow? Are you returning your moisture to the atmosphere before you die? How ecological of you.”

...I-I shouldn’t have said anything! I’ve been turned into an experiment in death ecology!!

He mentally began sweating blood and tried to think up an answer to the question that had started this.

...But I can't possibly know the answer.

He felt trying to hide his ignorance was the worst thing he could do. He would rather be known as an idiot than someone who pretended to know more than he did. After all, that way he would not be lying.

“Toori-sama, have you been taking me along with you over something you did not understand yourself?”

“W-want some more roast apple?”

Ah, I'm trying to avoid the issue, he realized, but his life was at risk here.

After a few seconds, Horizon's expression remained the same yet she spoke up.

“Judge. I will take a slice.”

As soon as she took the slice of apple, she became enveloped by the color white.

It was a flock of doves. The white doves began picking at the skewered roast apple in her hand.

“...!?”

Horizon did not know what to do.

Toori had transferred ownership of the skewered roast apple to her, so it was hers. However, the doves were already pecking at it.

...From both a sanitary and quantity perspective, I am at a disadvantage.

She came to the following conclusion about the current situation.

...The doves approached for the food I am holding.

She wore an English uniform and the hat had feather decorations. Her hair color was also similar to them, so she had enough for them to let down their guard.

However, the word “but” entered her thoughts. After all, this was something that had never happened in her normal life. There were only a small number of birds on the Musashi and there were certainly not this many white doves.

...And do birds really get this close?

Animals that could fly and escape her grasp were drawn in by food. This could be easily recreated, but was it worth remembering? Not only was there no purpose in remembering it, but losing food like this was a negative.

“Then...”

What was she supposed to do now? She only knew one thing for sure.

“Toori-sama.”

“Hm? What is it? Actually, are you okay buried under there? Oh, come to think of it, this is dove play, isn’t it!? D-damn! I want to become a dove and peck at your breasts as a messenger of peace!”

Her punch landed even through the flock of doves, so all was well.

However, the doves did not leave her. Horizon decided to give up on the apple because Toori still had two skewers left that they could split between the two of them.

She began using her arms to manipulate the flock of doves. The largest dove that was likely their boss was near her hand and it would occasionally kick away the other doves.

But that was wrong. The doves likely had their own procedure for who got the food, but Horizon did not care.

...This is my space, so even the boss dove must obey me.

She held the skewer in her right hand, warned off the boss and other larger doves with her left, and gave some space for the smaller doves that flew to her arm. The boss and other larger ones wandered around down below to grab the pieces that fell from the skewer, so the flock was split into an upper and lower group.

“Oh, there you are.”

The idiot caught sight of her from the other side.

...He has done nothing despite my troubles with the doves, so he is less Mr. Impossible and more Mr. Incompetent.

“Hey, Horizon.”

“What is it?” she asked while listening to the flapping of dove wings.

“Are you sad now?”

Horizon tilted her head at that question. She was nowhere near sad at the moment, so why would he be asking that?

“I am not sad, but why do you ask?”

“Because, Horizon,” he said with a smile spreading horizontally on his lips. “If you aren’t sad, it means you’re happy.”

Toori himself was not sure if that was the case.

However...

“You probably haven’t noticed because you started from nothing. Nothing is normal for you, but that’s not actually the case. People normally have all sorts of emotions in reaction to things.”

“Really?”

Really.

“It catches you off guard. You’ll be walking beside me with your breasts shaking and boom! I’ll spot the side of your breasts from under your arm and wham! You’ll crouch over and your legs- I-I’m sorry! I got carried away!”

“Just continue.”

“Fine, fine,” said Toori while cautiously prostrating. “I don’t know if the deadly sin emotion is giving you this emotion of rejection or if something that was left inside you is reacting to the deadly sin emotion, but you have a desire to resist the deadly sin emotion.”

“And the emotion in opposition to sorrow is...?”

“That’s right.” Toori thought about the past and answered Horizon’s question. “It’s the desire for the happiness of not being sad. It’s a ridiculously luxurious emotion that lets you feel happy with nothing at all.”

He could not put it to words well, but he tried.

“You could call it the status quo.”

“The status quo.”

It was not the easiest explanation, but Horizon understood what he meant.

He was referring to the feeling of ease when released from a state of sorrow.

...I once...

She had once felt pain upon gaining the emotion of sorrow and realizing what it meant to lose her father. Toori had been by her side then and he had helped her with it.

...But can I really say I endured it?

Even now, she would occasionally think of her father and criticize herself for not thinking anything or doing anything when they had crossed paths or even before that.

...Am I...

She raised her arm to lift the flock of doves and she asked a question with their flapping wings hiding her expression.

“Am I a cruel person for not feeling the same pain as before and not crying when I think about my father now?”

“The truly cruel one is any parent that wants to bind their kid by having them never stop crying. Parents are the people who tell you not to just cry forever.”

She heard his words through the white feathers.

“You’ve stopped crying because you’re resisting the sorrow. And your dad didn’t die to make you sad. He was telling someone to gather your emotions and save the world from the apocalypse.”

“Then I...”

“Don’t rush things, Horizon. A performer who immediately jumps at any new material will never master any material. ...Wait. Does that apply to me and how I immediately jumped at the new material of the Logismoï Oplo at Mikawa!? It does, doesn’t it!?”

“...”

“A-are you mad!? Don’t get mad, Horizon!”

“I do not have the emotion of anger. Stop deciding things for me.”

“You seem really mad to me!!”

“Anyway,” she muttered.

The apple must have lost its shape because the doves began settling down and the flock felt much heavier without all the flapping.

“Are you saying I have positive emotions to oppose the negative emotions I might obtain and I have simply not noticed because I started with nothing?”

“Judge. If you suddenly tell an amateur to laugh, he can’t do it. This is the same.”

He then changed the subject.

“By the way, Horizon, once you’ve calmed down some, let’s make a grave for your dad. To say it again, he didn’t die to make you sad. It can wait until you aren’t sad anymore, but we’ll be super busy with all the fun stuff we’ll be doing and we’ll need a reminder to make sure we don’t forget that cruel dad of yours. When you have it in you, you can go look at it and feel sad. And once you stop feeling sad, we can greet him during the Bon festival or New Years. I can tell him what fun stuff we’ve been up to. Or is ‘stuff’ too casual for that? I’m sure it’s fine when telling him I’m his son-in-law, right!? I can call him d-dad!!”

That boy would sometimes enter his own world and not return. This was one of those times.

As Horizon stared at him along with the doves, he finally returned.

“Amazing! A perfect score! ...Anyway, that’s what we can do! What do you think!?”

“Even when you emphasize it like that, I do not understand.”

“That’s fine, that’s fine.” The idiot held out a hand to stop her and spoke. “You’ll be fine, Horizon. I know you can oppose any negative emotion. After all, your dad was cruel, but he had a heart of opposition on top of it that led to that second rebellious phase. All that’s left is to see whether you want to oppose those negative emotions.”

“What will happen if I oppose them?”

“Remember what I said before? Once you regain everything, you’ll have only happy things left.”

“Is...”

...Is that really the case?

Would she really be able to overcome the pain of sorrow and everything else?

She did not know. They were discussing nothing but transitional stages and speculation with no real conclusion behind it all, so she could not make the decisions necessary to find an answer.

“Can I really bring war to the world for my own selfish desire?” she asked.

“I don’t really know about that one either. If we gather your emotions in the Logismoï Oplo, we can save the world from the apocalypse, and that seems a good enough reason for you to take part in the struggle for them.”

But...

“You want to avoid having people die or nations destroyed just because you want emotions, right?”

“Judge.” Horizon nodded. “That would mean my own selfish desire was bringing others the same pain I felt in my father’s death. I have determined the thought is not contradictory.”

“See? So think about it a bit.”

“About what?”

“Judge. What if? What if gathering the Logismoï Oplo would save more people from sorrow and other negative emotions than if you didn’t gather them?”

He took a breath.

“Then you could go to war.”

“... ”

Horizon was left speechless, but the idiot did not seem to really understand what he had said and he continued speaking as if it was just a casual idea.

“It doesn’t matter when. If you ever feel you can do that, then tell me. Until then, we’ll be going to war on our own. If you can ever convince yourself and fall into step with us, then fight alongside us. When that happens, we’ll truly be together.”

She did not immediately reply.

Could she save something by desiring war?

What would it take for her to be certain of that salvation?

She did not know.

She did not know, but she still spoke.

Based on what she had thought here, her method of opposing sorrow, the positive emotion she held, and this leeway to think about the meaning of war, should she accept or reject the offer?

“I will put off my decision for the time being, but what will you do, Toori-sama?”

“I’ve decided. It kind of came to me just now.”

“What have you decided?”

“I’m going to war.” He smiled. “After all, you won’t lose to those deadly sins, so I want to see you after you’ve got all your emotions back.”

“Even if I do not wish for that?”

“Don’t be silly,” he said. “That’s fine too. If it makes you hate me, then I’m just back to square one. I’ll return everything to you and continue on as the next me. I’ll think how much fun the short time I had with you was, I’ll thank you and the idiots who helped me out, and I’ll go find someone new who’s like you. ...Listen. I’m doing all of this no matter what you say. I’ve already made up my mind. I made up my mind back when I killed you and back when I met you again.”

And...

“That’s how I can purify my greatest sorrow.”

Horizon said nothing.

Nor did he. The only motion was the doves lowering from her shoulder and arm.

Their gazes naturally met and Horizon gently nodded.

“What a selfish fool you are. Are you trying to make yourself look good? You’re laying it on a far too thick. If this was a video, you would be adding in slow motion and softening it with a gentle light. How cheap.”

“D-dammit! I was actually thinking that myself, but you didn’t have to say it!!”

“Well, whatever.” Horizon sighed. “Thank you.”

“Eh?”

“I will not say it again. I am an automaton after all.”

“Oh... Hm... I see...”

She glared at him and he fled three steps back with a shriek, but Horizon ignored it.

“Everyone will be delighted to hear you have decided on your policy.”

“Well, I more or less decided on this ten years ago, so you can wait another ten years to make up your mind.”

Horizon was unsure if that was meant to be considerate.

“I hope that I can make my decision at some point. That is the best decision I can make at the present time.”

“I see.” He smiled. “Thanks.”

Horizon nodded at his smile but then let out a breath.

“Toori-sama, aren’t you forgetting something?”

“Eh? D-did you want me to grope your breasts!? I-I’ll get right on it, so wait there!”

She swung up her right fist and the idiot once more fled three steps back.

“Anyway,” she continued in exasperation. “Please do not forget that the others have been brought inside some strange space. They are likely fighting to allow us to speak like this and our conversation is now complete. That means we should go save them.”

Toori tilted his head and asked a pertinent question.

“How?”

Horizon’s glare intensified as she asked him a question.

“Do you not have a means of saving them? Surely you do. Before you were acting as if this was not a real problem.”

Her quiet voice led the idiot to move back another step.

“W-wait a sec! I’m not an arrow-obsessed barrier expert like Asama and I can’t do anything in some forceful way or another like my sis! Oh, I know! With Asama and sis, that space doesn’t stand a chance! Hey! Sis! Asama! Please help!”

“You called?”

With the sound of tearing paper, several figures appeared out of thin air while wrapped in wind. Asama and Masazumi appeared, Naruze was being carried on Asama’s back, and a final girl led the way.

“Sis!?”

Horizon saw the girl stand calmly to the side and brush her hair into place.

The girl smiled and began stroking Horizon’s hair.

“Heh heh heh. Foolish brother and adorable Horizon, no matter what trouble your inexperience lands you in, do not forget to call for your wise sister. No matter how far apart we are and no matter what stands in the way, I will always arrive to save you. That is the duty of an older sister. Your wonderful sister delivers!!”

“Stop that.” Asama struck Kimi’s back and did not bother to fix her bangs. “The space only connected here because I managed to use Toori-kun’s call as a handhold. No matter how much I tried without that, it felt like the spatial wall was simply being pushed away from us.”

“Judge.”

Horizon nodded and turned to Toori while letting Kimi embrace her from behind while the girl laughed.

“It really is all about relationships, isn’t it?”

“Just accept it, Horizon. It’s all pretty amazing.”

“Heh heh. What’s all this? If it’s something you can tell your wise sister, then tell me.”

“Wait, wait,” cut in Masazumi.

She had lost her coat and she was covered in dust and dirt, but she ignored it and looked between Toori and Horizon.

“You managed to talk, didn’t you?”

“We talked plenty!”

She frowned, but Horizon spoke up.

“I have decided to put off my decision, but Toori-sama seems to have made his.”

She felt Kimi’s breathing settle down a bit behind her, Asama nodded next to her, and Masazumi’s expression changed.

“In that case, all our efforts were rewarded. Musashi has decided what path it will take.”

She turned toward Naruze on Asama’s back. The girl was unconscious, her clothing and wings were battered, and parts of her were soaked in blood, but Masazumi took a breath and continued speaking.

“This is what we wanted. If Aoi had been unable to decide on his policy and it was all left up in the air, it would have led to an even more horrible ending.”

Masazumi breathed a sigh of relief in front of Aoi and Horizon.

...This was definitely worth doing.

She would learn later what it meant for Horizon to put off her decision, but Aoi’s decision would resolve a good number of problems and worries. He had decided

how Musashi would interact with other nations all the way up to the Peace of Westphalia.

...We can make it through the meeting this evening.

With that in mind, she moved to take Naruze from Asama.

“If we managed to leave the theatre space, the others might have as well. Asama, can you contact them?”

“Yes. From what I have been able to monitor, Mito is a little injured but asleep. I will go see if she is okay right away. The others seem to have finished their duels as well and I already have divine texts from Naito and Urquiaga. It seems they can meet up with us. Also, Heidi and Shirojiro are negotiating with Lord Howard outside the theatre space. They have contacted me and seem to be fine, but...”

“But?”

Asama responded to everyone’s question with a troubled look.

“I have no word from Adele, Suzu-san, or Futayo on the first level.”

Adele and Suzu lay in a narrow, dimly-lit space. Toward their heads were some snacks covered in a handkerchief and their foreheads were held together. Adele spoke to Suzu who blushed and squirmed.

“Ah, Suzu-san. R-right there. Use your index finger. Nhah... I-I can’t stay quiet. Amazing...”

“L-like this? I-I’ve never done this before. I-is this right?”

“J-Judge. R-right there. I-I can’t last much longer... Y-you take care of the rest!”

“Judge,” answered Suzu as she squirmed and brought both her hands to the sign frame. “I-I’ve never played...a music game before. ...It’s fun.”

“Sorry I’m so bad at this. I trip you up when we play together and use up all of our extra lives. You have super fast reactions, you know that?”

“Do I?”

Suzu tilted her head while arriving at the final stage of the music game installed on the sign frame. Her cheeks were flushed as she felt the tension the game tried to provide.

Adele could feel the other girl’s body heat as she watched.

...I’ve never seen Suzu-san like this before. I’m glad I had this game in here.

She did not want to play games on her own while in a sightseeing area, but her official position meant she could easily have long periods of time with nothing to do. Before leaving, she had used Musashi’s Catholic Stand to download some multiplayer games Suzu could play with her.

...But I never knew I was this bad at music games!

When waiting on her own during the past four days, she had earned some okay scores, but Suzu had easily surpassed those.

Adele missed those past days when she thought there were four stages. It turned out there were thirty-two in all. On the final stage, Suzu was cleaning up a riot to the beat of a festival drum. The standard process was to carry their heads to display on the prison gate, but she would occasionally enter a stampede of burning them alive in straw coats. As the judgments of “good” continued, the umbrella roulette of responsibility would spin and all the criminals would be dealt with in a joint responsibility fatality. Suzu’s accurate control created a high-speed rap from the noises.

“Ahi! Ahi! Ahiahaaaaaahi!! Ma-ma-ma-ma-magistrate! Strawwww cooooooat! Coat coat! Spin the umbrella even more than usual!”

Just as Adele saw the fatality roulette activate for the fifth time, she noticed a new color on the console above her head.

At the same time, Suzu spoke while beginning repeated taps to hammer in the stakes for the human sacrifices.

“Do you...hear something?”

“Hu-hu-hu-hu-huma-huma-human sacrifice! Sacrifice sacrifice!! Thank you very much!”

“Oh, you beat the game. You can type your name in. Go there and, um...the S is there...the U is...”

As she gave the instructions, Adele wondered when she would ever beat that score.

...I can't distract her any longer.

She nodded and answered Suzu's previous question.

“They're trying to force open the mobile shell from outside.”

Adele heard Suzu reply after a short pause.

“Can they...open it?”

“Well, a purge can be forced from outside in case the pilot can't move and someone has to rescue them, but the method is secret and only the health committee of the academy knows it. I doubt Musashi's health committee would reveal that to England and Principal Sakai and Vice Principal Yoshinao are at the academy. Even if England requested it, they would never hand over a secret like that.”

Either due to what Adele had said or some other reason, Suzu gave a small smile and nodded.

“But...is what they're doing...okay?”

“Hard to say. It sounds like they’ve been hammering away for a while now. I really doubt that will accomplish anything, though.”

The joints were completely closed off and most of the armor was fixed in place on the inside, so it would be difficult to remove it from the outside. In the mobile shell’s current state, the inside was completely sealed off and the temperature was stable.

Knights and vassals had come about during the age of conflict known as the Middle Ages and the continuing evolution of their ways was seen in Adele’s mobile shell.

“Well, I don’t actually know how a lot of it works, but we should be fine. My family can be overprotective.”

“Really?”

“Judge.”

In the off chance that England did get it open, Adele knew it was all over.

...But is there really a way to open a mobile shell that was closed from the inside?

Suzu then tilted her head.

“That noise...”

A faint and repeating metallic noise could be heard from the back of the shell. It sounded almost like the ticking of a small clock.

Adele could only guess what was going on outside, but Suzu had a different idea.

“Can I...use this?”

She held out a cable from her rod-shaped sensor named the Noise Neighbor.

She was hoping to amplify its auditory information using the mobile shell's sound system.

Noise Neighbor was made by IZUMO, so shared divine transmission settings would be needed for it to operate along with a mobile shell created with Hexagone Française technology.

Adele glanced at the sensor's connector.

“Let's see... That's a standard plug shape, so... Judge. It'll work. Are you ready?”

“Yes,” answered Suzu with a nod.

Adele took the sensor and plugged it into the socket inside the shell's chest that she usually used for a divine radio. As soon as she did, a sign frame appeared next to Suzu's face.

The outside voices appeared as text.

“Lady Dudley! Please wait another three minutes! The shape was different than expected.”

That meant Dudley and the others were handling the mobile shell in some way and their next words explained how.

“Th-th-that is fine. That is fine. Yes. No need to hurry. Three more minutes is just fine. Yes. Good! Only that much longer...”

Yes.

“And this mobile shell will have been transformed into a weapon.”

Dudley watched the others work in the large guest room.

...Turning a mobile shell into a weapon.

Musashi's mobile shell was a defensive armament, so they would modify it into a weapon and thus allow Dudley to control and open it with her Testamenta Arma.

"I-it's a reversal of ideas. Turning armor into a weapon. H-h-h-h-how very interesting."

"Lady Dudley, whose idea was this?"

"Te-te-te-te-testament. Our queen's."

The group nodded in approval and continued their work. Dudley was delighted to see that comment had changed their posture and speed of work.

...I love the queen!

Robert Dudley narrowed her eyes and spoke once more.

"I-i-it's been three minutes now, hasn't it?"

"I-it's only been just over one, Lady Dudley!"

It must be due to my high blood pressure giving me such a full life! concluded Dudley as she waited for the work to finish.

A giant grip and spike were being connected to the mobile shell which was stretched forward and backwards while leaning back.

That vassal had been used as a shield during the Battle of Mikawa and on the Musashi. Thus, the queen had reached the idea of making it a spiked shield which was both a shield and a weapon. That would allow Dudley's Testamenta Arma to open it.

But due to its size, the modifications had to be made with god of war parts. They had hurriedly brought in equipment and tools for gods of war, received advice from specialist technicians and pilots, and were now continuing the work.

While waiting, Dudley looked out the window.

The window faced south and gave her a view of the Tower of London.

As Dudley narrowed her eyes toward the fortress tower, the female student recording the work process asked a question.

“Lady Dudley, you have been inside the Tower of London, haven’t you?”

“Te-te-te-testament. I have. I was imprisoned in that tower and rescued by the queen.”

That was the truth.

According to the Testament descriptions, Dudley had been the queen’s lover and aide.

“A-a-a-after all, the original Dudley was imprisoned for a political offense.”

Dudley had adored the queen for rescuing him and had fought with Cecil and the other leaders for the queen’s affection, but that had led to suspicions that he had assassinated his wife and his power had declined.

His glory and fall had both come suddenly. At first, quite a few people had hoped to inherit the name for the initial glory despite the ensured dishonor later on. But due to the pressure of the war with Tres España and the strict monitoring of the history recreation from the Testament Union, those hopefuls had all vanished. That had led to a woman inheriting the name.

...I did not exactly want the name. It was forced onto me.

Those around her had decided giving the name to a woman would avoid the lover issue and the scandal surrounding it.

“I-i-i-it happens all the time.”

Her muttered comment drew everyone’s attention, but she ignored them and looked to her feet. The ball and chain attached to her legs were from her time as a prisoner.

...These are an important connection between the queen and me.

She had decided to keep those heavy metal balls chained to her legs and she had never told anyone why, not even the queen. Once the others turned away from her and those metal balls began working once more, she spoke.

“N-n-n-now, how well-made is this? Is it enough to delight the queen?”

“Testament,” replied all those working.

The student testing the durability of the connection turned toward her.

“Lady Dudley! The preparations are complete! Even the god of war pilots are praising it with comments like ‘that should do it’, ‘that looks sturdy as hell’, and ‘are you sure you didn’t mistake a giant shield for a mobile shell?’!!”

“Testament.”

Dudley raised her right hand and spread the fingers of Brachium Justitia – Vetus.

“O-o-o-o-open sesame!!”

In that instant, Adele used a powerful kick to operate the pedal in the mobile shell’s foot space.

Her action frightened Suzu.

“Wh-what!?”

“Uh, this is gonna get a bit bumpy.”

Adele removed her glasses and embraced Suzu.

“I’m using the emergency escape device.”

Adele nodded toward Suzu’s tilted head and checked the sign frames that appeared around her.

...The output is good for everything. In that case...

“Um, Suzu-san, let me explain. This uses all the mobile shell’s strength for a giant leap. It’s meant to let the pilot escape without assistance if they’re buried in rubble while defending a castle or fall off a ship and sink to the bottom of the water. The great strength means it can’t be used while someone is fully wearing it and it uses too much power to use more than once or twice. We have plenty of locator and divine transmission technology these days and this method puts a huge burden on and can even crush the person inside, so it tends not to be put in modern ones.”

She adjusted her grip on Suzu and spoke with no hint of self-deprecation.

“But my family can be overprotective and this vassal’s divine shell was created based on a book on Middle Ages technology. Let’s use this to break through three floors’ worth of ceilings and escape.”

“Wh-where will we go?”

“The roof of the Tower of London’s northwestern tower has the smallest difference in height, so it would be safest. It stands out with Ex. Caliburn there and we can defend the tower-top position, so England will have to be careful.”

Once Suzu nodded, Adele kicked the foot pedal.

“Here we go!”

The mobile shell harshly vibrated up and down, broke through the fortress’s ceiling, and soared into the sky.

All that goes up must come down.

The giant shield-like armor floated in England’s sky, slowly rotated, changed its trajectory to the south, and arrived at the apex of its parabola. After that, it gently began to fall.

“ ... ”

It fell between the first and second levels where the Tower of London's northwestern tower was.

People watched it fall from all over. There was an especially large number around Oxford Academy.

A lot of people were waiting at the academy's entrances as they had been sealed off due to the “collapse of the courtyard”.

There were also the people gathered to see Mary show her face from the Tower of London.

Some had gathered because they heard the noises in the courtyard and assumed it was part of the festival, but then a giant mass of metal had appeared overhead.

They all looked upwards in surprise.

“_____!!”

They let out cheers of joy when their expectations were met.

“Did you see that!? They cleared the wall with armor! This has been another amazing year!”

Drawn by that shouting, a single figure dashed across Oxford's courtyard.

It was Honda Futayo.

“That strange shape! Is that Adele's mobile shell!?”

Futayo saw Adele's mobile shell fly past the southern side of the fortress.

However, a group of Oxford warriors was waiting ahead. They had entered the courtyard to prevent Futayo from meeting up with those outside.

A few units had already created walls to seal off her movement.

Nevertheless, Futayo ran straight forward. The group of warriors next to the southern wall was seven-men thick.

Someone on the front row realized what she was doing and shouted out.

“She’s planning to jump over us and the wall! Prepare yourselves, everyone!”

They held long spears from England’s ArchsArt and shields of light produced by Anglican Testament Signs.

Futayo saw the EOTA logo of the England Old Technique Academy on the spears. That meant they likely had added reinforcements from spells but had a basic structure based off of IZUMO spears.

...Those are the same design as the Stabbing Bamboo series, so they should attach to the hard point under the arm and essentially become a part of their body.

Futayo thought as she ran and used a movement spell to up her speed.

“Sorry.”

She used her running motion to step over one of the spears as it was thrust toward her and she kicked downwards.

The spear provided the proper reaction to the downwards kick from above.

“...!”

That step gave Futayo the force she needed to launch herself upwards and she fired Tonbokiri’s extension device toward the ground. She spoke as she felt it shoot out.

“Let us fly, Tonbokiri!”

“Understood.”

She leaped toward the passageway on top of the fortress. She landed on the edge, cut across the passageway, and accelerated. She would use her momentum to leap toward the Tower of London.

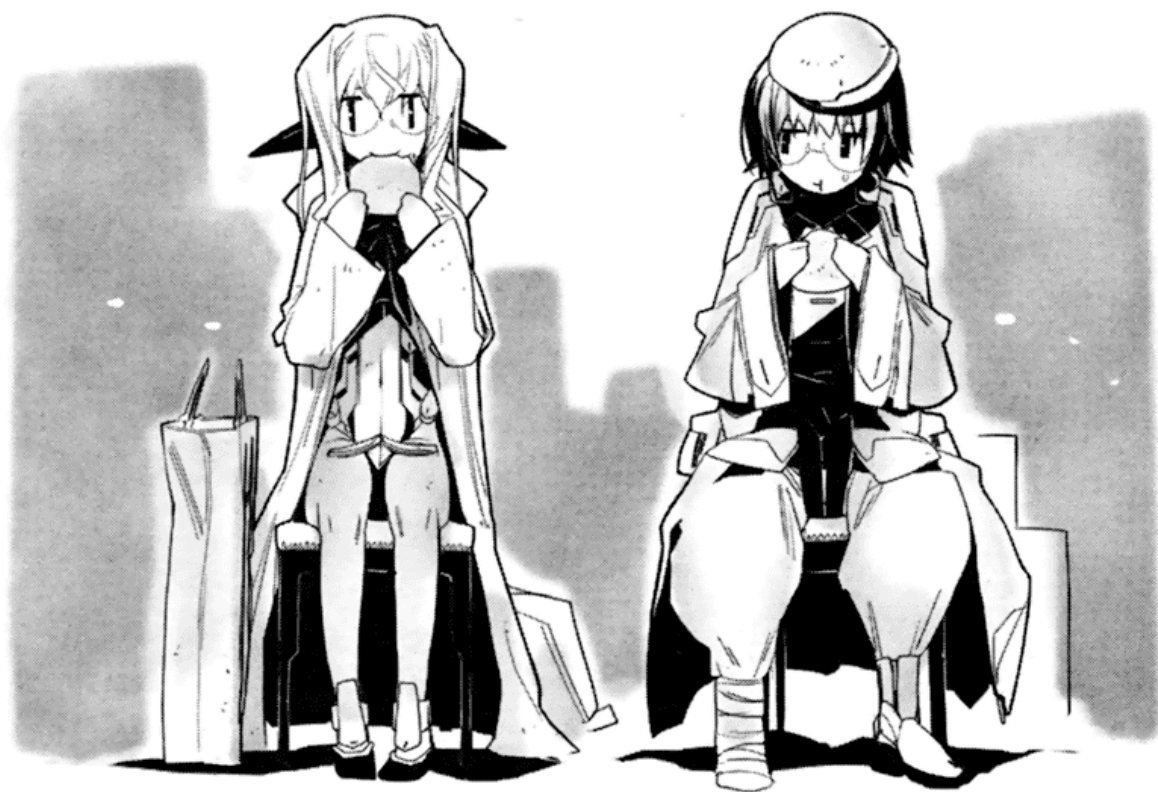
Without fear, she kicked off the edge of the fortress and jumped into the empty space beyond.

Cheers rose up from below.

Chapter 39: The One Left Behind in the Cage

CHAPTER 39

"The One Left Behind in the Cage"



What if you parted ways
Before even meeting?

Point Allocation (Confusion)

What if you parted ways

Before even meeting?

Point Allocation (Confusion)

Neshinbara was turned to the side and leaning against the back of his chair. This was partially to turn his back to Shakespeare as she read her novel, but he had another reason as well.

...They look familiar.

The wall was not directly behind him and there was a walkway for participants and storage space for items being carried out. He had a good view along the wall and he was currently focused on the break area a few booths away.

That area had chairs and tables, but most of the people were sitting on the floor.

Neshinbara noticed two in particular sitting with their backs to the wall.

One wore a sheet over his head and had tights on the legs sticking out. The other wore a hug pillow cover and tights. The sheet and pillow cover both had characters from the popular English anime television show “The Evil Fairy Teletubs” printed on them. The two of them had a pile of doujinshi in front of them and were loading them into wooden boxes to carry out.

“Nobu-tan! Nobu-tan! We hit the jackpot today and it feels great!!”

“It does, Koni-tan! England truly is wonderful! I love it!”

They were likely Musashi residents, but Neshinbara decided it would be best to ignore them.

...Being considerate is tough for us normal people.

“Twisting your body like that is bad for your legs,” commented Shakespeare.

Thinking it would be too childish to ignore her, he fixed his posture and found her holding out something white with other colors. It was a round piece of bread with cooked vegetables and meat inside.

“Eat this. It doesn’t look like you brought anything. Was that because you planned to leave early as you assumed no one would come?”

It irritated him that she was exactly right. He had brought some snacks, but he had never seen anything like this offered bread and accepted it out of curiosity.

He noticed she held an identical bread and he held up his.

“What is this? Some kind of history recreation?”

“It’s a slight modification of the Roman offula. Try it.”

He took a bite and found it was still warm and had soy sauce in it.

“Isn’t this a pain to make?”

“Testament. Quite a few bread products are sold in the market, but if their existence is later discovered in the Testament descriptions, the already existing ones are used as an interpretation. That means we can prepare things in lots of ways without worrying. For authors like us, the experience of making them for ourselves is important research.”

“Thank you for that lecture from a professional. Are you hoping to use what I think as research?”

“I need you to describe the flavor. Do it directly with no comparisons.”

He chewed and noticed the texture of the mincemeat and the bean sprouts which were cooked with salt. As he relished the elasticity of the meat with his back teeth, he spoke.

“You don’t usually have salt with bread, but it’s interesting that you can manage it by adding in these ingredients. Bread already gives two different flavors with

the inside and the cooked crust, and adding the ingredients allows you to enjoy both of those flavors.”

As he spoke, Shakespeare took notes with her sign frame’s keyboard.

“Thank you. I didn’t think you would answer.”

“Why not?”

“Anyone would think that after reading the interview from when your novel was published in that magazine.”

Oops, thought Neshinbara. I gave my opponent a foothold to attack from.

But he also realized how petty he was for being unable to ignore her.

“I was so excited then that I couldn’t see anything around me.”

“I thought as much. You wouldn’t be able to say what you did otherwise.”

She then said the words he found so embarrassing he wanted to die.

“ ‘I am the type of person who could not work in any other profession, and I think I received this honor because I am someone who can only become an author.’ ”

She took a breath.

“Well said.”

He wanted to gather his things and run away, but Shakespeare took a bite of her offula and spoke.

“When you maintain a road in a public works job, you feel you have created a piece of the nation. When you add numbers to a register in an office job, you imagine some grand industry lies beyond those numbers. When you farm, you hold pride in the fact that you are supporting the nation and its people. In truth,

someone who can become an author is the type who can feel sentiment for any profession. Of course, athletic abilities and personality compatibility come into play as well.”

Neshinbara understood what she was trying to say, so he spoke up for her.

“Are you saying I was wrong when I said I couldn’t work as anything but an author? Are you saying I simply wasn’t looking at any option except that?”

“That is true but not what I am getting at,” stated Shakespeare. “You said two interesting things. The first is what you just mentioned. The other...”

He had a guess.

“ ‘I am someone who can only become an author.’ Is that it?”

“That was quite interesting,” she said. “Most people – myself included – are *trying to become* an author or are *trying to remain* an author, but you were saying that you had been born as someone who would definitely become an author, weren’t you?”

Realizing what she meant, he felt his body temperature sink.

He heard a shuddering sound form his blood vessels as Shakespeare continued speaking quietly.

“I still do not think I have become an author. I still don’t know what I can do to equal William Shakespeare whose name I inherited or how much I must accomplish to...” She took a bite. “How much I must accomplish to overcome the bonds of this name and name myself an author under my own name of Thomas. But you were the type who would definitely become an author.”

“I’d say you’ve done more than enough to be called an author.”

“To you, is ‘author’ nothing more than a term to write down as your occupation because it is *something you will naturally become because of who you are*? If so...”

If so...

“Is that why you quit writing just because of a few insults? Was it of little value to you because you *became one* so easily?”

She still did not turn toward him and took a breath after eating half of her bread.

“You haven’t changed.”

“You...”

Just as Neshinbara began to protest, Shakespeare asked a question.

“Who do you think I am?”

“...”

“A good question, isn’t it?” she said as he took a bite of offula.

Just as he noticed the mincemeat tasted like salt, her voice suddenly rang out once more.

“That girl died.”

“Which one?”

“I don’t know. I don’t know which one I am.”

That left Neshinbara speechless and she did not stop there.

“After we parted ways, you went to Hexagone Française and we went to England. ...She wasn’t doing well back then.”

He had a feeling he did not want to hear this, but he also had a feeling she would stop and never again tell him if he told her to stop. He instead remained perfectly silent.

“On the ship to England, she said she couldn’t go with me any longer.”

Why was that?

“The three of us had said we wanted to write books and see our books in a bookstore.”

Shakespeare lowered her head and filled her mouth with offula. She cleaned her thumb with her tongue, wiped her hand with the edge of her white coat, and slowly stood up.

“That girl might have become an author.”

As she quickly gathered her things, no strings of letters were coming from her hair.

...Has the theatre space ended?

That fact made him worry about his classmates’ safety, but he could not do anything because of Macbeth on his right arm and the cast on his left leg.

She grunted as she put on her backpack and lifted her paper bag.

Neshinbara watched her prepare to leave, but she asked another question.

“Does the current bearer of the name Thomas resemble that girl?”

It was only then that he realized what she was looking at. He averted his gaze and heard her speak as if from overhead.

“So you don’t know which one I am. It is true we were very much alike aside from our personalities.”

So...

“If you ever realize the answer, will you tell me?”

“If I realize that, will you forgive me?”

“No,” she said with her back turned. She had circled to the side of the table and continued toward the canyon formed between lines of people. “If you realize that, it will make that girl happy.”

Tenzou and Scarred stepped outside in the afternoon sun.

Scarred was a step ahead to his right.

He had not spoken with her since learning of the Princess Disappearance of Chancellor Henry VIII in the Tower of London’s southeastern tower, but a certain thought was on his mind.

...Who is she?

Upon leaving Chancellor Henry VIII’s study, she had placed the key in her pocket. That meant she was someone close to Chancellor Henry VIII, but who?

...Fairy Queen Elizabeth?

But that could not be it. Unless she held a position similar to Toori’s Mr. Impossible, her time would be too filled with official business to spend it on anything like this.

...Mary-sama?

That did not make sense either. Double Bloody Mary was imprisoned in the southwestern tower, she occasionally made an appearance for the people of London, and that had continued while he had been with Scarred.

...Then who is she?

Was she a maid or some other relative?

As he thought, Scarred walked around the Tower of London’s moat and toward Oxford.

A blockade preventing access to the first level was still in place before the stairway to Oxford. The crowd was thick and the people still seemed intent on making their way up. People walked by and Tenzou passed by a few children and adults.

“Scarred-dono, that area is still-...”

As he tried to slow down, she continued on ahead.

Who was she? For that and many other reasons, he wanted to see more of her and so he tried to line up beside her and then move out ahead of her.

However...

“ ... ”

She noticed what he was doing and took a half-step lead.

He filled that half-step gap, but she took the lead again.

...This is Zeno's paradox!

Tenzou recalled that Zeno was a Greek philosopher. He had been gay, but he had put together a method of dialectics using questions and answers. One of his playful demonstrations was known as the Paradox of Achilles and the Tortoise. It created an impossible paradox where swift Achilles attempted to catch up to a tortoise but *could never do so* because the tortoise was constantly moving forward.

...But that also describes the current situation between Scarred-dono and me.

For the history recreation, someone recruited to be Achilles had tried to catch up to the tortoise and Zeno had charged in from the side to physically stop Achilles and keep him from catching up. At the time, Zeno had begun his question and answer method by asking “Does it hurt? Well? Does it hurt?” and Achilles had tapped out. That had been the world's first demonstration on the effect of the Achilles lock.

As it was only a history recreation, some had wondered if it was going too far to force a paradox to work, but it had been ultimately deemed “close enough”.

That paradox was also used in movement spells, but Tenzou compared it to the distance between Scarred and himself and he realized a certain fact. They were almost competing over whether he could fill the gap, but he was enjoying himself.

“Scarred-dono.”

He spoke up to ask if she was enjoying it as well, but she immediately replied.

“Master Tenzou, how about we play a game?”

“A...game?”

Thanks to living with his horrible class, he had nothing but bad memories concerning that word.

...N-no. She isn't like them.

Despite that thought, his long years of experience made him afraid to ask further.

“What kind of game?”

“Judge. If I see your face, I win. How about that?”

Oh, but that would be impossible, he immediately concluded.

That was only natural for a ninja.

...Revealing our face is the same as dying.

Just as he tried to tell her that, a shadow passed over him, he heard a voice, and a noise filled the air.

The top of the Tower of London's northwestern tower was suddenly smashed to pieces.

“...!?”

Stone and wooden fragments fell from the sky and to the side of the moat.

Tenzou made up his mind in an instant.

...I'm worried about Scarred-dono, but she can use spells!

“Scarred-dono!”

He was certain saying that would be enough, so he began to move. He was near the moat. The falling stone and wood fragments would likely fall in the moat, but that was not all that mattered.

...The children!

Even if they were not hit, the fact that no one had protected them would carve fear into their hearts.

Crying in fear and crying in relief over being protected were greatly different things, so he ran in front of the three children and tried to hide the danger from their view.

“...!!”

The rubble ultimately fell in the moat behind him. He heard several sounds of the water splashing and being struck, but nothing hit him as he carried all three children forward a few steps. Their eyes were wide with surprise, but they did not know what had happened and showed no sign of crying.

...I made it in time.

After the final sound from the moat, he lowered the children to the ground.

“That was a close one,” he said cheerfully.

The children nodded as they gradually grasped the situation. Men and women who were likely the children's parents rushed from the crowd in front of the stairway to the first level, but Tenzou merely raised a hand toward the children and moved away. Not standing out was crucial for a ninja.

...Okay. Um...Where is Scarred-dono?

The commotion had caused confusion in the surrounding people, so he looked around trying to find her.

“Scarred-dono!”

“I’m over here!”

He saw her white shirt beyond the crowd and under the arcade opposite the moat. Her hand was raised and she seemed to have moved away from the commotion.

...?

The fact that she had avoided the danger seemed strange, but he was not entirely sure why and mentally tilted his head.

...Well, no one was hurt, so it doesn't matter.

He moved past the people moving about in confusion, faced Scarred, and prepared to ask her if she was hurt.

“I’m glad nothing happened,” she said while suddenly moving up to him.

She lightly embraced him as if clinging to him.

Tenzou realized he had stopped moving.

The reason for this was simple. His life had contained very few opportunities to touch the creature known as the opposite sex, but one of those stood directly in front of him and was taking an action he had even less experience with.

She was leaning against him.

...H-how indecent! More! More!

His outer facade and true thoughts mixed together, but when he tried to speak aloud, nothing came out.

“...!?”

All he knew was that heat was rapidly gathering in his face and he was sweating all over.

...Wh-wh-what is going on!?”

Even as he asked himself that, he had yet to figure out what had seemed so strange since a moment ago.

“...!?”

He reflexively grabbed her shoulders and peeled her from him.

Not only that, he lightly shoved her forward and moved back a few steps.

With some distance between them, he lowered his hips a bit and saw Scarred's confused face before him. The lowered ends of the eyebrows and the tilted head formed an expression he would call pity.

However, he ignored that expression and his entire body grew cold.

He finally noticed that her hair lacked the white water lily.

Realizing what that meant, the remnants of the heat and sweat completely vanished. All that remained was a faint chill on his spine and tension in his side.

...This is dangerous.

“Who are you?” he asked Scarred.

Scarred once more tilted her head when Tenzou asked for her identity.

“What is it?” she asked while raising her right hand to stop him and taking a step forward.

“...”

But he took a step back and turned his body to the side. He held his left elbow forward to use in defense while his right hand reached for the short sword on the back of his waist.

“Who are you?”

“Don’t be ridiculous. It’s me. It’s Scarred.”

“No, it isn’t.”

There was something else he could point out beyond the water lily.

“Scarred-dono is not the type to prioritize her own safety and move away from danger.”

“But you called out to me, telling me to fall back.”

“No, I didn’t.”

His doubt had solidified to certainty and his right hand wrapped around the short sword’s hilt.

“I called Scarred-dono’s name to have her take up a position to aid anyone I could not. Most likely, she is currently helping someone beyond that crowd.”

He took in a breath.

“Who are you?”

Scarred brought a hand to her cheek, lowered the ends of her eyebrows, hung her head, and frowned, but she stopped moving.

“So you saw through it.”

Tenzou watched as she raised her head.

She peeled off the scar on her face with a finger and revealed a face that look much like Scarred's. However, the lack of scars on this similar-yet-different person confirmed the danger for Tenzou.

“Well, it doesn't really matter if you saw through it. She only needs to understand.”

As she walked, her hand slowly reached for his throat.

She did not move quickly, but Tenzou realized something.

...I can't move!?

His mind was resisting, but his body would not move.

...No, is it obeying the air and the earth!?

The air settled like a solid, the wind wrapped around him, and the earth grabbed at the bottom of his feet and refused to let go. He tried to pull his arms and body away, but his clothes and the air around them were as hard as armor and would not let him pull or push.

As he inhaled, he felt as if his body were being controlled by his windpipe, so he stopped breathing.

...This is...

The technique controlled the ether making up the space.

...A spirit spell!!

Spirits could be said to be ether itself. At a certain level of density, they gained wills of their own and could even communicate with humans. Spirits spells were primitive spells used to communicate one's intentions to them.

The most important aspect of spirits spells was having an affinity with the spirits in question.

...But the spirits read her intentions from nothing more than the movement of her hand and they obeyed her!

This was not normal. It was rare even among veteran spirit spell masters to control multiple types of spirits at once, but this girl had simultaneously used wind, earth, and air spirits without speaking a word.

Who would be able to do something like that? Before he could find an answer, her hand reached further toward him.

“I will take away the key to her decision”

She grabbed his throat.

“...!”

But an instant later, her hand was pulled away.

At the same time, a warmth akin to listlessness filled his body and he regained his freedom to move.

The girl was looking at him after taking a few steps back. Her eyebrows had risen slightly, but the corners of her mouth rose and she was clearly trying to agitate him.

Before he could realize why she had moved away, she opened her mouth to speak.

“Why so serious?”

She glanced over his right shoulder, stepped further back, turned around, and started toward Oxford. Meanwhile, Tenzou looked to the right and found why the girl who resembled Scarred had ended her attack.

“Scarred-dono.”

She and the white flower were there.

Her eyebrows were raised, her lips were pursed, and she was staring intently at the other version of herself.

Tenzou noticed a few tears in the corners of her eyes and that her shoulders were rising and falling a bit.

No, it was not just her shoulders. Her breathing itself was trembling.

...Is she afraid?

He understood what scared her without having to say it.

That girl who resembled her stood before the stairway to Oxford.

She turned her back to the people trying to reach Oxford, folded her arms toward Tenzou and Scarred, and gave a small smile.

“I suppose I should say it now: long time, my friend...no, my sister. Isn’t that right, Double Bloody Mary?”

Chapter 40: Standing Alone on the Parting Paths

CHAPTER 40

"Standing Alone on the Parting Paths"



What further forces one
To accept and go along with the parting?
Point Allocation (Common Sense)

What further forces one

To accept and go along with the parting?

Point Allocation (Common Sense)

...Double Bloody Mary?

For a moment, Tenzou simply could not understand what the girl resembling Scarred had said.

His mind filled with confusion, but a voice removed that confusion.

“Master Tenzou.”

Scarred stepped forward from his right.

Her expression changed as she stood between him and the other version of herself who claimed to be her sister.

She smiled with the ends of her eyebrows lowered, but she faced straight forward without lowering her head.

“Master Tenzou.”

When she called his name again, he looked her in the eye and gradually understood it all.

...Double Bloody Mary.

He recalled and went over what that would mean. The girl before him had cared for a graveyard of three hundred swords and many scars remained on her face and body.

“So that was all because you were Mary.”

“Judge. I am the sinner who killed three hundred while trying to turn England back to Catholicism.”

He nodded with the ends of her eyebrows still lowered, but she did not stop there.

“In the Tower of London, I asked when Mary could have been born seeing as Queen Catherine was too weak to give birth, remember?”

The answer stood before him. The two similar girls indicated the truth.

“When Anne Boleyn gave birth to the Fairy Queen, she had twins.”

Tenzou listened to Mary’s explanation that was similar to a confession.

“We are twin sisters, but I took the name of Mary because I did not possess even half the power of the Fairy Queen. At the time, Queen Catherine had already passed away without having any children, but Queen Anne Boleyn needed to demonstrate her intent to obey the history recreation because our birth was a deviation from that recreation.”

“So she was executed?”

“Judge.” Scarred who was actually Mary nodded. “My birth meant the loss of two mothers.”

“I-if you were twins, you could say the same about the Fairy Queen!”

“Is that any reason to turn those sins toward the one who has great power and is leading England into the future? Given the proper order, I should have been born first and none of this would have happened had that been the case. All the problems stem from me not being born and then from me actually being born later.”

“ ... ”

Tenzou was dumbfounded.

“If at all possible...”

The ends of her eyebrows were still lowered and she forced her smile to remain.

“...I didn’t want you to know.”

Tears spilled from her eyes.

She lowered her head, tensed her shoulders, and wiped her face, but Tenzou could not say anything.

He did not know what to say.

Excuses for that came to his mind, but she cleared her throat as he hesitated.

“Master Tenzou.”

Once she looked back up, her usual smile had returned.

The tears were in the way, but a shake of her head caused them to fall. When she opened her lips and spoke, her voice contained a faint tremble.

“Shall we play our game?”

A game. As she spoke that word, she took a step forward. He wondered what she would do and realized she was close enough to embrace him.

“ ... ”

She narrowed her eyes, raised her chin as if stretching her back, and extended her neck.

...This is the pose from a kiss scene.

She raised her chin once and then twice, but he did nothing despite knowing what she intended.

...Ehhhhhhh!?

He finally recalled that their game was for her to see his face.

If they were to make physical contact here, he would be forced to physically remove the scarf from his face, but that would mean his loss.

...I will gladly lose! simultaneously declared both his left and right brain.

However...

“ ... ”

Something bothered him, so he asked a question without thinking.

“Mary-sama. Will Scarred-dono remain with you?”

He was asking if the person who protected the fourth level would remain.

Mary's eyes opened in surprise at Tenzou's question. Her teary eyes looked directly at him and bent as a smile covered her face.

“Judge!”

Once the festival came to an end, Mary would be executed. He had asked if that execution meant her death and she had given him a clear answer.

“Do not worry. I will not disappear. Do you remember what I said before? Mary will be saved in the end.”

“Is that so?”

As he breathed a sigh of relief, Mary smiled bitterly and lightly struck his chest.

“I guess this means I lose.”

Declaring her loss brought the kiss scene to its end.

...But can I really let it end like this?

Mary was the sister of Elizabeth, who was chancellor and student council president of England. Continuing to interact with such a person would aid the Far East, but doing so more than necessary and influencing each other could ultimately hinder the history recreation.

She seemed to understand that as well because she clasped her hands near her waist and lowered her head.

“Judge. I will now be entering the Tower of London to prepare for the history recreation. Tres España’s diplomats have arrived and the conditions for the armada battle cannot be met without me. However, the Musashi will leave England once the history recreation is complete, won’t it?”

She just rejected me, he thought blankly as he lowered his head as well.

...It would sound weird to wish her a good execution.

But he could not think of anything else to say.

“Judge. Goodbye.”

“Judge. Until we meet again.”

They gave their minimal parting words and both gave a sigh, but he felt this was the right thing to do.

If he did not let his temporary emotions influence him, he would not cause any trouble between England and the Far East. And the next time the Musashi came to England, she would have been removed from the bonds of the history recreation.

Once that happened, she would be free after retiring from her inherited name.

...If we meet again next year...

If all went well, he hoped to meet the true Scarred in that fourth level village once more.

“Scarred-dono?”

He felt he was being thoughtless and stupid, but he asked anyway.

“I-is there a kind of guy...you especially like?”

For a moment, the look on her face was one of surprise, but it soon changed to a bitter smile.

“I can’t exactly tell you that.”

But...

“But if I did meet someone like that, I would want be someone who leaves a lifelong scar on him.”

I see, he thought as his shoulders drooped. We really have cut all bonds now.

“Goodbye.”

She took in a breath and turned her back to him.

He stepped back to show he was letting her leave and he watched her slender back.

She left while putting on the cloak she had brought with her and hiding her face.

She walked away and, unlike before, he felt no need to pursue her. It was only then that he truly felt she was on her way to fulfill her duty.

She had shown him her casual clothes, her smile, and a truth about the Princess Disappearances.

...Was that all as thanks for maintaining the graveyard, creating the hot spring, and helping in the fields?

He watched her leave and saw Elizabeth waiting for her.

The queen's arms were folded and Mary's path would pass right by her, but then sudden voices came from the stairs to Oxford.

The gathered crowd cheered and they opened a path to the stairway.

Tenzou looked over and saw three forms walking down from Oxford.

One was the large form of Vice President William Cecil, one was the slender form of Vice Chancellor Robert Dudley, and the last was Ben Jonson, the secretary and athlete poet.

The people cleared a path for the three officers and only then realized Elizabeth was already on the path.

Their exclamations of surprise quickly grew to joy.

"The queen!"

"Testament. I have come out in the common attire today. This is not bad for a change."

She received a multitude of voices saying "testament", but their voices gradually lost enthusiasm as Mary approached the queen and kept her face hidden by her cloak's hood.

Suddenly, new figures appeared from between the people on either side of the path.

"The Trumps."

Voices of admiration and awe left the crowd as those six people appeared.

Drake, the bloody Hard Wolf.

Hawkins of the Trident, who maintained his form despite being wrapped in injury-healing bandages.

Grace, the sighing dryad.

Walsingham, who dried her wet hair by brushing it with her floating hands.

Nicholas, who easily swung around his giant hammer.

Lord Chancellor Hatton, the Living Bones with will-o'-the-wisps floating around him.

They met up with the three who had walked down the stairs and formed an arcing line behind the queen. This hid the queen from the public's view and also hid Mary.

Tenzou heard a sudden voice as he alone faced them from a distance.

“Master Tenzou.”

Mary looked over her shoulder at a point twenty meters from him and ten meters from Elizabeth. Her bangs hid her expression, so her scar was all he could see clearly.

“This was fun. I was saved even further by learning I could have so much fun, so I truly am fortunate.”

Tenzou just about replied with “judge”, but he noticed an indescribable danger in her words.

...What is this?

He was not sure why, but he felt he should not let her go here.

In that moment, a girl's voice shouted down from far above.

“Don't let...her go!!”

It was Suzu.

Tenzou heard his classmate's voice which did not attempt to hide her desperation.

“She isn't...isn't being...saved!! Th-this...is the same! The...same!!”

What was it the same as?

“Horizon!!”

Adele nodded in agreement with Suzu from the top floor of the half-destroyed northwestern tower. She was working to protect Suzu who yelled down from the wall that had broken down to the floor.

...This facility shouldn't be here!!

She was currently investigating the data acquired from Suzu's Noise Neighbor which was connected to the mobile shell.

The top floor of the northwestern tower contained Ex. Caliburn.

The crust the sword was stabbed into had been transplanted into the tower. From there, it was directly connected to England's ley lines and it could fire the giant light sword that protected the nation.

However, Noise Neighbor's inspection of the firing point's internal structure said something else.

“The appearance is different, but it's been modified to have almost the exact same effect as the Andamio de la Ejecución we saw at Mikawa!!”

Adele could see the English Andamio de la Ejecución before her.

The sounds Suzu had heard coming from England had likely been this modification. The sounds reverberating through the ley lines had been caught by the ether detectors in Noise Neighbor's sensors.

The Andamio de la Ejecución was covered with white and gold decorations. Overall, it looked like a cake five meters across. Ex. Caliburn grew from the stone crust and ripples created with various decorations surrounded it.

...This one is likely based on permeation rather than time.

Tres España had built a barrier and the person inside was broken down into ether, but this would emit that dissolving power from the floor and eliminate anyone on that floor. It did not use barriers because they knew the victim could not run. The lack of walls had kept it small and allowed even England to build it.

...Of course, it still uses Tres Españan techniques, so they had to have either stolen them or been given them.

The piece of rock forming Excalibur's pedestal had a single sentence engraved into it.

"Mary's proud spirit will forever be with England."

That could only mean one thing. Adele nodded toward Futayo who readied to fight the warriors climbing the stairs and Futayo returned the nod and spoke.

"Say what you know. As vice chancellor, I give you authority to speak."

"Judge," replied Adele before taking a breath and shouting. "1st special duty officer!!"

She could not see her classmate from here, but Suzu had told her what she had heard.

...The 1st special duty officer is with Queen Mary who was going by the name of Scarred!

Adele did not know why he was there, but she knew what she had to tell him.

...He was close to Scarred this entire time!

As a vassal on the outskirts of chivalry, she was thoughtful enough to realize what that meant.

“1st special duty officer! She will be executed! She will be broken down into ether by the Andamio de la Ejecución and used to strengthen Ex. Caliburn!”

From the modifications made to the crust, the ether pathways, and the ether accumulation, that much was clear.

“She’s lying about being saved! She’s talking about the salvation of death! Queen Mary is of the ether-like fairy race! She intends to return her power to England’s ley lines in order to eternally become one with England and protect it!”

Adele took in a breath before finishing.

“That is the salvation she wants!!”

You’re kidding, thought Tenzou.

If she considered death to be her salvation and an Andamio de la Ejecución had been prepared...

...How long has she been prepared for this!?

Had she decided long before she met him? The most likely timing was when she had been unable to pull out Excalibur.

He recalled how she had maintained that graveyard and helped out the people of that village.

...Was all that a brief diversion as she was preparing for death!?

Everything that happened on this day and before was the same. And if this was how it would all end...

...I thought I understood you, but was I no help at all!?

As he questioned himself, he came to a realization.

“ ... ”

He took a step forward.

Tenzou was shocked to realize what he had done.

...This isn't good.

He was a ninja. A ninja was to remain hidden and obey his ruler from the shadows. He had already decided not to do anything that would work against the Far East.

“ ...! ”

But he stopped questioning himself once he took a second, third, and fourth step.

He moved forward.

For what, he did not know. How could he tell her to stop in this situation?

He did not know the answer, but he tried to call out to her as her shadow stretched out toward him.

“ ...!! ”

He was unsure whether to call her Mary or Scarred.

A moment later, he realized that her shadow was stretching toward him despite her being to his north.

...A ninja technique!?

The shadow instantly took form and rose from the ground.

It became a man resting the giant hilt of a sword on his right shoulder.

He stood quickly but the hilt could not have been light. His armband indicated he was a member of Trumps and he was likely trained in swordfighting and ninja techniques.

Hiding in shadows was a major type of stealth technique. It could be seen as a reverse usage of Zeno's paradox as it created a large space in which to hide by continually subdividing an incredibly thin space. It was an actual spell that could be used with Blessings, so it was quite powerful.

...If he can become a shadow so splendidly, I can't let my guard down!

Tenzou's course would collide with the man, so he gathered strength in his waist and used a technique from seven meters away.

Ninja techniques used a variety of standard techniques primarily based in martial arts, so anyone could accomplish them with training. The basic principle was to require no outside materials and to be usable even in extreme situations such as being injured.

Tenzou was trained in many ninja techniques that had their foundation in martial arts and he used one of those now.

“...!!”

He accelerated his body toward his opponent's left side and then circled around on the right side.

He ran in the opposite direction than he appeared to be.

The action itself was simple. He turned his entire body to the left and moved his hands and feet to the left.

...But I move my knees and elbows to the right.

The technique forcibly twisted his forward motion, but his opponent would initially detect the direction of his body and the movement of his extremities.

That made it difficult for his opponent to notice the change in his direction of movement.

Simply put, it was an upgraded version of a feint that took advantage of an opponent's attention.

A moment later, the man rotated a normal-sized hilt in his hand.

“Is that a gravity sword!?”

The man flipped a switch on the hilt which changed the mode from “enemy” to “self” and he then pointed the hilt at himself.

“ ... ”

The man stabbed the gravity sword into his own gut.

A voice of surprise escaped Tenzou's mouth.

...What is he doing?

But an instant later, Tenzou saw the result of the action.

The man split into two of himself.

...He distributed the gravity sword's attraction and decomposition to split himself in two!?

He had safely broken down his entire body below even the cellular level to create two less dense copies. The technique could be called a seppuku gravity clone, but keeping the nerves connected and the problems presented in the separation and recombination would require great skill.

The two copies grazed through each other a bit as they spread to the left and right.

Their locations covered both options from Tenzou's feint and the wind was already whipping up as they wielded new gravity swords.

“Kh!”

Tenzou was up against two people now.

He avoided having his feet swept out from under him, but that was all he managed.

After their attack at his legs was avoided, the two men launched piercing attacks much like pointing fingers.

And they hit.

Mary turned back when she heard multiple footsteps and she saw the sight from within her hood.

Tenzou’s running posture crumbled and his knees struck the ground. His right hand opened wide as if reaching for her.

“ ... ”

But the partial mist of blood created by the gravity’s decomposition burst from his back near the shoulder blades.

The color scattered through the air and the ninja collapsed face-first to the ground below it. He maintained his running posture, but his arms lost strength from the shoulder down and his entire body collapsed to the dirt to his right.

She heard the sound of flesh striking earth.

His clothes scraped across sand, his body curled up, and his legs swung through the air as if he were still trying to kick off the ground.

He curled up to the side as if showing his back off to her.

“Kah!”

The sudden damage sent his body into shock and he began trembling.

Mary gasped and nearly turned fully toward him, but she realized Walter stood next to the collapsed ninja with gravity sword in hand.

Instead, she swallowed her gasp into her gut and took another breath.

“Leave him there.”

She looked at the few footprints he had made.

...I'm sorry.

The injury piercing from the front to the back was the type he did not want.

She could not respond to him, but she could protect him.

“He has nothing to do with Double Bloody Mary, so he has nothing to do with you either. Isn't that right, ‘Trident’ Walter?”

That final name produced a nod from Walter. He returned the gravity sword to the external latch on his uniform, so Mary breathed a sigh of relief, gave a small bow, and turned her back once more.

However, a new voice stopped her before she could begin walking again.

“Hold it right there, Walter! No, Yamanaka! What do you think you're doing!?”

It was Milton.

Tenzou watched everyone as his consciousness faded due to blood loss.

Running up behind Milton were his classmates from Musashi. Many of them were injured, but most of them were there. When they noticed him collapsed on the ground, Asama spoke first.

“O-oh, no! Tenzou-kun died without anyone noticing!”

“No, look closer, Asama! He’s still twitching like a bug! He’s alive!”

“Who?”

...Don't jump to conclusions, don't be so horrible, and was that Horizon-dono for that especially cruel last one!?

Milton then spoke up as he flew along the road ahead of them.

“Yamanakaaaa! Have you truly betrayed Lady Mary!? Are you sending the one who saved us to her death!?”

Walter, who was being called Yamanaka, scratched his head with a troubled look. He silently turned toward Tenzou and then faced Mary.

“Damn you!” shouted Milton.

A moment later, a slow but firm voice was heard. It resembled Mary’s but had more strength behind it.

“Milton, I have a position for you if you wish to join us.”

The Fairy Queen’s voice contained a slight smile and she then turned to the Trumps lined up alongside her.

“Honestly, none of you know how to bring back results. If you wish to hand your number over to that crow, just tell me.”

“Don’t compliment me! The great man that is Milton will not take part in your plan to protect England by sacrificing a noble spirit!”

“Ha ha. Don’t be like that. With the war against Tres España approaching, I simply prefer a crow to this lot who were rebuked by those Far Eastern amateurs. Oh, and that assessment is a national secret.”

She was insulting her own subordinates, but she spoke with a tone of joy. Tenzou did not know what they had done, but he could guess it involved duels with Musashi.

The queen had likely found joy in her subordinates' desire to protect England more than in their actual results.

...Duels.

If Scarred had realized that was going on...

...That must be why she challenged me to a game.

At that point, she had already viewed herself as on the queen's side, so had he understood anything about her?

The queen who had known everything spoke to his approaching classmates.

"This festival entertainment is over." The queen stood in front of Mary. "So let us begin the true festival. Tonight, we will hold a party in Oxford and there we will determine England and the Far East's stances toward each other."

After her next statement, Tenzou's mind fully fell into darkness.

"The world's entertainment and England's entertainment have come to an end. And it is all thanks to the apocalypse."

"This festival entertainment will be over soon, won't it?"

Heidi spoke to Howard across the document-covered table on the terrace.

Is everyone okay? she wondered with a feeling similar to impatience in her heart.

"I look forward to seeing how exciting tonight's party will be."

"As do I," agreed Howard.

She then noticed Shirojiro's behavior next to her. He maintained his negotiating posture.

...Shiro-kun?

She turned toward him, but he spoke without returning her look.

“Lord Howard, this piece of ‘entertainment’ has allowed England to tell the Testament Union you took actions to secure the Musashi. On the other hand, Musashi eliminated England’s representatives and demonstrated we have the same level of individual strength as you. These duels were valuable to both of us and we can now negotiate from a position that leaves no room for influence from the Testament Union. After all, now that we have sent our representatives against each other, they cannot force us into war.”

However...

“Lord Howard, that is a problem for England, is it not?”

Eh? thought Heidi.

She tilted her head, looked to Shirojiro, and asked a question.

“What do you mean? We’ve shown we’re equal and England has an excuse for the Testament Union, right?”

“Equal is a problem, Heidi. Equal means the Musashi can leave England whenever it wants and possessing military might on par with England’s special duty officers mean Musashi will enter the world with the same status as England. The Testament Union will never allow that.”

In which case...

“The meeting tonight will not be on friendly terms. England will try to suppress us. But what reason and method will England use to suppress someone with supposedly equal strength, Lord Howard?”

Realizing what he meant, Heidi turned toward the English treasurer in surprise.

Howard pushed his glasses up his nose, reached into his pocket, and pulled out a paper he had prepared before arriving here.

“Testament. This bans the Musashi from leaving port and temporarily ceases all trade.”

Howard placed the already approved document in the center of the table.

“Now that it has proved its military might is on equal footing with England, Musashi is a threat to other nations. As such, England will forbid the Musashi from leaving port and hold it here.”

“...!?”

Heidi quickly checked the Musashi’s fuel data via a sign frame.

Based on the engine division and command division’s data, they could reach the nearby IZUMO headquarters under normal cruising. *But*, she thought just before Howard spoke.

“The Musashi’s damage has yet to be fully repaired, so it cannot escape with gravitational cruising in the event of a surprise attack. Also, your reserves of fuel should be just barely too low to travel by stealth cruising. After all, you have yet to make any transactions involving fuel here.”

“Was that on purpose?”

“No, it was merely an issue of priorities. Ether fuel is an important resource for England as well, so we merely held off on that until last. It is but a happy coincidence that it also allows us to cease all trade and hold the Musashi here.”

That final comment reminded Heidi of what Howard had said just before ending their discussion on the diplomatic ship.

“You asked Musashi to use you as our exclusive contact for trade with England. Was that request so you would have the authority to issue and manage a notification such as this?”

“Considering even the unlikely is the foundation of reliable trade,” said Howard as he stood. “You can attend the Peace of Westphalia under England’s protection. It is not a bad option if you ask me.”

Don’t be ridiculous, thought Heidi with a frown. *Then I can’t flirt with Shiro-kun while we travel around the world! We were supposed to have all sorts of fun in Hexagone Française next! Nwaaaah! My plans are ruined!!*

As anger filled Heidi’s mind, Shirojiro replied to Howard.

“That would indeed be an excellent option for us.”

“Eh? W-wait, Shiro-kun!”

“Heidi, think about it. No matter what our horrible classmates did, we could blame it all on England.”

“Oh, I get it! You’re so smart!!”

“Ehhh!? Y-you’re fine with that!?”

As Howard grew flustered, Heidi glared at him.

“Just to be clear, we have several people who are troublesome on a national level. If you tried to resolve it with money, it would bankrupt at least three nations!”

But, she thought. *This really is a problem.*

She produced a number of documents on sign frames and showed them to Howard.

“A fair amount of manufacturing is performed within the Musashi and other nations desire a lot of it. Most notably, the universal joint used to combine devices produced by the other nations’ companies is exclusively made on the Musashi. Will you be using England as a midpoint to continue that trade?”

“Testament. By preventing the Musashi from leaving port, England will receive the benefit of being an intermediary both politically and in the trade between

Musashi and other nations. On the other hand, the Testament Union and other nations will benefit from the stable history recreation brought about by the Musashi not spreading conflict throughout the Far East. Lastly, Musashi itself can rely on the other nations and the rules of the history recreation to reach the Peace of Westphalia with a minimum of trouble. After all, the other nations have no choice but to recreate the Peace of Westphalia. Is there a problem with any of this?”

Howard went on to ask another question.

“If I designate the two of you as my contact point with the Far East, you should be able to seize almost all the money entering the Musashi. That is not a bad deal for any of us, don’t you think?”

Shirojiro did not reply, but Howard spoke as if to answer his own question.

“England has a reason for holding the Musashi here. In many ways, the Far East’s Musashi is inexperienced as a nation, so we must protect and instruct you.”

“Quite a selfish form of protection,” commented Heidi.

Shirojiro raised his hand to keep her from continuing, looked Howard in the eye, and spoke.

“So England is holding the Musashi here to protect it, stopping all trade, and asking us to obey you? If that is the issue at hand, it falls beyond the jurisdiction of treasurer. You would need to speak with Vice President Honda Masazumi. However, she is a formidable opponent. Try to sell her something and she will refuse simply because she ‘has no money’. Isn’t that right, Heidi?”

“Judge. She won’t borrow money either because she ‘wouldn’t be able to pay it back’. That politician has no weak points for a merchant to exploit. I’m glad she’s on our side.”

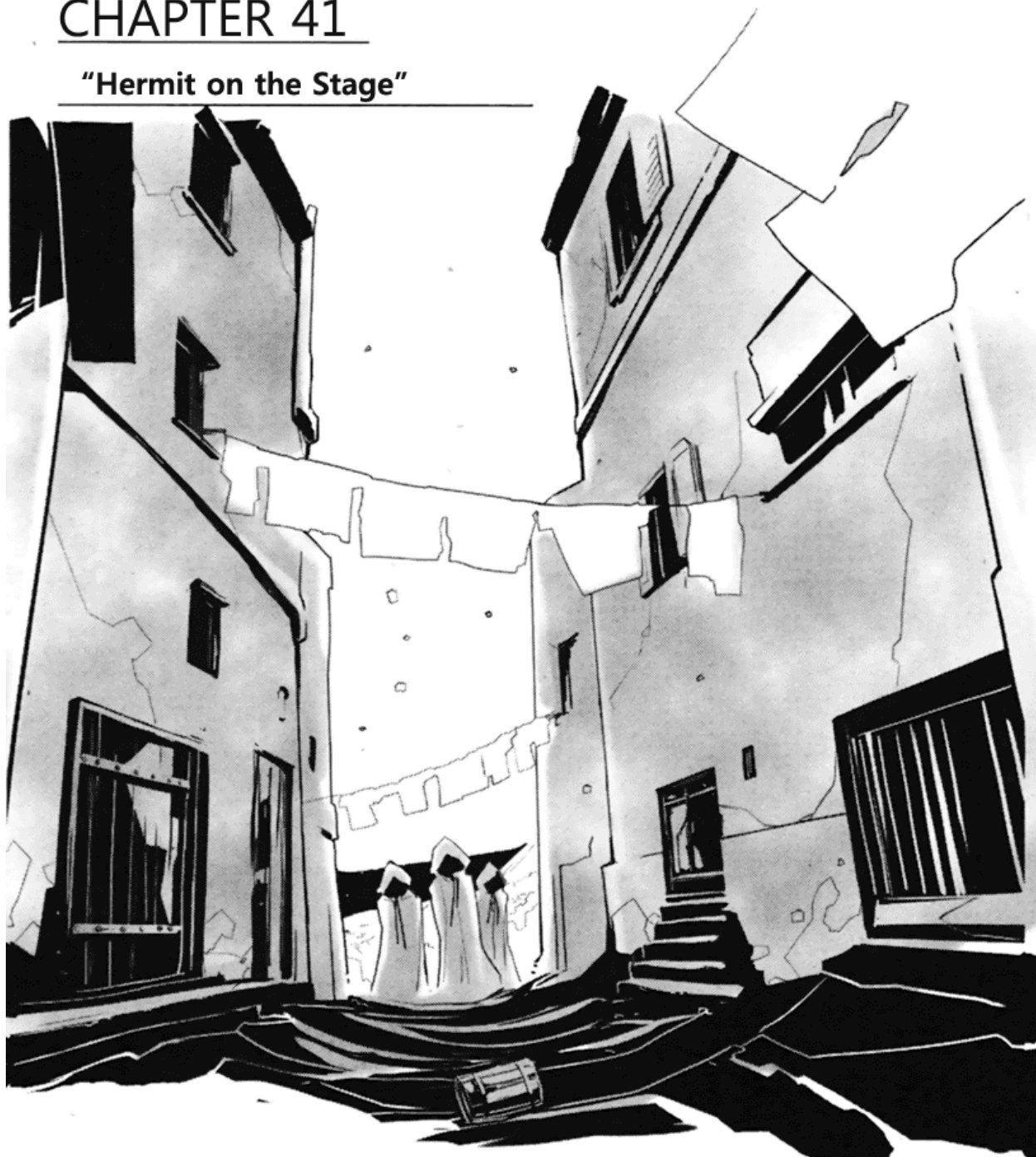
Heidi took a breath and thought about how troublesome everything had become.

“It all comes down to the meeting this evening, doesn’t it?”

Chapter 41: Hermit on the Stage

CHAPTER 41

"Hermit on the Stage"



What naturally leaks out
Even if it is hidden?
Point Allocation (Trouble)

What naturally leaks out

Even if it is hidden?

Point Allocation (Trouble)

White plaster buildings filled a town on a slope. Tres Españan flags could be seen below the blue sky. They were raised on the occasional simple signal at the narrow intersections, but none of the people, oxcarts, and carriages using the streets obeyed them. They all noisily travelled back and forth and up or down the rough stone paving.

Chairs were placed in front of the filthy houses lining the streets, but people were also sitting on the road as they passed the time. None of them had jobs, so they sat around talking, betting on dice throws, or playing card games.

Occasionally, a man holding a hunting horn by the ocean at the bottom of the slope would motion toward them. Whenever that happened, a street corner's worth of men would walk to him.

They would descend toward the ocean and a while later carts would begin travelling along the road.

All of the slopes switched between the two states of standstill and motion.

Meanwhile, some figures ascended from the harbor.

There were three of them and they all wore filthy cloaks and hoods that had originally been white. The one in the lead was a dark-haired and short young man and he was followed by a brother and sister with blond hair.

The people who saw them would raise their eyebrows at first, but they would soon bend their eyes in a smile and call out to the short one up front. One raised a hand in greeting and noticed how the short young man's feet disappeared before reaching the ground.

“Hey, what’s all this, Señor Bat? Did you take on some apprentices?”

“More or less. How have things been with you?”

“All the shipments from the New World have been a lifesaver. I thought about taking some of it for myself, but I was caught. I guess I got a little too greedy.”

“That’s for sure,” said those around him.

“Señor Bat” laughed and then asked a question.

“Is the King here?”

“Testament. Did you hear about it down below? He’s in the market. Sandro already lost and came back here. He went to all that trouble claiming he was undefeated in Hexagone Française.”

The man speaking with “Señor Bat” pulled a coin from his pocket and flicked it into the air.

“But talk isn’t enough when it comes to gambling.”

“Testament. But it can win you enough to cover the Millones, can’t it?”

“That it can.”

“Señor Bat” raised a hand toward the smiling men and continued down the road with the two siblings. A white domed building bearing Alcalá de Henares’s crest was visible on the western hill on the left side of the town.

That was the primary school building.

The three of them climbed the slight slope of the street while looking toward it.

As they did, the sister asked “Señor Bat” a question.

“Captain Takakane, why did they call you ‘Señor Bat’?”

“Oh, that,” replied Takakane. He continued facing forward while passing by a woman carrying some market goods home. “I haven’t actually revealed my identity. I’ve hidden it while playing here for a long time. More recently, I’ve been coaching a kid’s baseball team with Fusae. I seriously trained them to show I wasn’t doing it out of pity and they made it to the semi-finals in the previous tournament. Velá also comes down here to paint frescos when he wants a change of pace from doing nothing but history recreation paintings. ...Juana doesn’t know about any of it, though.”

“It’s the first we’ve heard about it too. You told us to rely on Velázquez and we did so, but I didn’t know it went so far.”

“Well, now’s the time to learn. But don’t tell Juana or Gin. Juana’s too straight-laced and Gin should probably hear about it from Muneshige.”

“Testament,” agreed the sister as she occasionally looked around at the people of the city. “I’ve heard this area described as the slums for people who can’t even attend the academy.”

“Have you noticed anything about it?”

“Testament,” replied the Valdés sister as she looked around. “It’s nothing but humans and long-lived...no, humans and the half-lived who are a mix between human and long-lived.”

“Sister, I can’t tell the difference between long-lived and half-lived.”

“Hmm. I can kind of tell from their mannerisms.”

“Testament. That’s right,” said Takakane. “The half-lived are visually identical to the long-lived. Even I can only tell once they start to move. The half-lived tend to have shorter ears, but there is a fair difference between individuals and between different types of long-lived. For example, the forest types have short ears naturally. But anyway, the half-lived have the same lifespan as humans, so...”

So...

“The long-lived age over many long years and their actions adapt as their athletic abilities lower with age. In other words, their appearances and actions both age at a natural rate and they can be said to mature properly. However, the half-lived age just like a human, but their mind does not adapt in sync with the aging of their body. Compared to a pure-blooded long-lived, their actions are a lot like an aging person trying acting too young. That’s why the pure-blooded long-lived treat them as if there is something wrong with them and why they are only just barely allowed to exist under Tres España’s policies concerning purity. Simply put, they are persecuted.”

He took a breath.

“But it’s strange. No one here knows much about the academy or politics, but I can relax and discuss my favorite teams here. Around Henares, commenting on teams would get too much attention from the broadcast committee’s Sol Periódico.”

As he spoke, he left the street and found himself atop the low hill. This had once been a section of the city, but now the shops of an afternoon market were set up along benches built on the old building foundations.

More people were gathered here than on the streets and it was louder too. Most of the people moving here and there were women, but some men were gambling and talking at the ends of paths and the benches with no shop set up.

“Wow. So this is the afternoon market you can see from the academy. I always wanted to go see it.”

“Sister, did you want to visit it with your brother? You need more variety in your methods of expressing love. For example, you could make me food every so often. Lately, I have been quite fond of orange mousse. That is a good piece of brother trivia.”

“Before you start filling me with strange trivia as well, try to remember why we’re here,” said Takakane as he entered the market. “You wanted to know

where the chancellor disappears to because you often have to run errands for him, didn't you?"

He cut through the moving crowd of people and the other two followed with unsteady footing. They spotted some normal people here and there, but young students were by far the most common.

However...

"Brother, people do know what our chancellor looks like, don't they?"

"Sister, have you forgotten how much trouble Lady Juana goes through every time he makes a public appearance?"

"But..." The Valdés sister pointed through a gap in the people surrounding a bench up ahead. "That's the chancellor, isn't it? He's completely blending in with the people here."

The middle aged man named Segundo wore a worn-out shirt and sat on the edge of a bench with one knee raised. His hair was loosely parted to the side and three chess boards were placed beyond his bare feet.

Even under the afternoon sun, he did not reach for the glass of water next to him as he faced the three men on the other side of the boards.

Occasionally, he would push his old glasses up his nose and make a move.

As he moved pieces on the left, right, and then middle boards, the people began to whisper.

"He's won the right and middle ones."

"How can he do so well without knights or a queen?"

Amid the commotion of voices, the three opponents' lowered heads grew even lower. The bearded man on the left who had yet to be defeated brought a hand to his forehead.

"Oh, damn. I've lost my escape route."

He raised both hands overhead to conceded defeat, a cheer filled the surrounding people, and money changed hands.

But just as the bearded man was about to clean up the left chess board, Segundo stopped him.

"Can someone tell him how he can turn this game around? I would bet on him."

"Eh?" said the bearded man.

A smile filled Segundo's eyes beyond his glasses.

"You still have a chance. You know how to take on a challenge, but you also need to know how not to give up."

"I'm not sure if I can say testament to that," he said. "But if our King says so, I'll give it a shot."

"Good, good. Avoid thinking about unpleasant things. Remember: 'If we have money, we'll use it. We'll give in to our passions, have a party, and forget everything unpleasant.' So let's have some fun."

"All right then," said the bearded man as he rolled up his sleeves.

Meanwhile, a young man who appeared to be a student sat down to be the next challenger. The surrounding crowd of people split apart and Segundo spotted someone beyond them.

Takakane stood there in filthy white clothing.

Takakane took a breath and turned toward the Valdés siblings.

“Well, I’ve shown you where he goes, so come find him yourselves in the future. I’ll give you some money this time, so buy something you like and head back. Just make sure you use the same path as on the way here.”

The siblings seemed confused by that, so he smiled bitterly.

“There are some thieves around these parts. Once they see how you buy things, they’ll know you aren’t from here or anywhere like here and they’ll target you. They won’t as long as I’m with you, though.”

“Testament. So that’s why we came up from the harbor without even trying to hide. We’ll be careful. ...Anyway, Captain Takakane, should the chancellor really be doing this? Do none of them realize it’s him?”

“A lot of them probably do. They probably recognize me as well. But he speaks to them as if they don’t, so they play along. More importantly, the commander is pretty well-known around these parts.”

“Has it been that way for a long time?”

“You know about the Lepanto, right?”

“Testament,” replied the Valdés brother.

He glanced over at the old weapon displayed alongside the market’s sign.

“That was a battle from twenty five years ago, before we were even born. It was meant to double as the Battle of Itsukushima and...” He hesitated. “Captain Takakane, in accordance with the history recreation, you fought under Sue, head of Tres Portugal, and died in the battle. For the recreation, you killed Captain Fusae when Mouri falsely accused her of treason and then you died in the Battle of Itsukushima itself.”

“But as a defense, both of you had double inherited names, right? You had España’s General Pérez de Guzmán and Captain Fusae had Admiral Álvaro de Bazán of the Lepanto.”

“Sister, people do not remain as ghosts because they have a double inherited name.”

The sister turned toward her brother in surprise.

“Brother, why are you being so serious? Are you trying to suck up to him!?”

“Sister, your recent insanity has me worried. Anyway, Captain Takakane, the two of you fought under Sue Harukata, the famous commander who controlled Tres Portugal, but Sue was also killed in the battle and Portugal fell to Tres España as history dictated.”

“Testament. That’s right. A lot happened between the two of us in that battle. It’s how we ended up in our current relationship.”

“I get that the Battle of Lepanto brought about your relationship, but what exactly happened? Can you tell us more about it?”

“What is this? Are you from the broadcast committee or something?” asked Takakane.

“Well...” The Valdés sister smiled without a hint of shyness. “You and Fusae always refuse to tell us.”

“There’s no point in telling you. Both sides of that double battle were a tough fight. At the time, Tres España, England, and M.H.R.R. got along well and Tres España was closely-connected to K.P.A. Italia, so Hexagone Française was surrounded on all sides. They used the Battle of Itsukushima to open a hole there and that made it a much harder fight, but there was one other reason for it.”

Namely...

“The Ottomans hadn’t been fully taken over by Oda at that point, and Suleiman ordered them to take the invasion even further than the history recreation required. Their plan was to win the battle but admit defeat to obtain a political victory. The fiercest fighting against the Ottomans happened where Velá, the commander, and a lot of poorly trained troops were. The Lepanto was said to be a huge success, but that’s because only the good things were recorded in the history books.”

“...”

The siblings were dumbfounded and a bitter smile entered Takakane’s voice.

“From what I’ve heard, the Lepanto was really bad. Velá only left behind a sketch, but it was a complete massacre. After all, the enemy defended with iron-reinforced ships that completely outdid our charging galleys and then began their big invasion. In both Itsukushima and the Lepanto, the front lines were used as shields and the rowers in the bellies of the Lepanto galleys died without being able to do anything.”

His bitter smile grew into a real smile.

“And those people were the half-lived you see here and their relatives.”

“Th-then the chancellor is here because of that?”

“Do you believe me?” asked Takakane. “During the Lepanto, there was an unknown commander who led many half-lived to safety but lost something truly precious of his own. If you believe me, then hurry on back. It’s too soon for the two of you to play here.”

In a dimly-lit ship corridor, everyone was gathered while holding their breath.

They were just outside the medical room of the Musashi transport ship that had crashed in England.

Three people stood directly in front of the door while the rest of the group was gathered halfway down the corridor.

Kimi held a basket of bloody bandages and Toori and Horizon faced her.

Kimi lowered her head a bit, but she faced her brother as she spoke.

“Listen, foolish brother. I am going to open this door, so are you sure you’re prepared for whatever you might find?”

“Sis, is Nate doing that bad?”

“Judge.” Kimi’s eyebrows lay flat and she nodded. “She definitely isn’t doing well. But she has resolved herself in a way, so don’t give any weird reactions, okay? When you see how bad she’s doing, make sure you don’t say ‘unh!’ or ‘owah!’! Don’t do it, okay!? You have to resist!”

“Sis! Sis! Is it just me or does that sound exactly like something I’d say!?”

“Heh heh heh. Foolish brother, do you really think a sister would betray her brother’s expectations!? I have to go dobaaan! Dovaaan!”

“Ohhh! I don’t have the slightest idea what that means, but it did a perfect job of getting across how hopeless you are! Anyway, sis, is Nate really not doing good?”

“Heh heh. Worried? Then go find out for yourself.”

Kimi placed a hand on the door and took in a breath.

“Now!!”

She flung the door open to reveal Mitotsudaira sitting naked on the bed as she changed clothes.

For a moment, Mitotsudaira was unable to react to the motion and noise from the door to the side of the bed.

The opened space revealed a dark corridor, Toori who was giving her a thumbs up, Horizon who was doing the same, and Kimi who was peeking in.

“See! Do you see, foolish brother!? Poor Mitotsudaira had her breasts worn down so much in her duel that she’s left with that flat chest!”

An instant later, a scream was accompanied by Musashi’s chancellor crashing through three walls and arriving in a corridor on one side of the transport ship. After he rolled along, struck the opposite wall, and bounced off, the people in the corridor stopped only for a moment and quickly stepped over him as if nothing had happened.

“Wh-what is this!?”

While Mitotsudaira held up a side table in her right hand for the second shot and hid her body with the sheets, the battered uniform-wearing boy returned through the smashed wall while laughing.

“It’s been a while since I took a hit like that! I let my guard down, so I didn’t get enough boke in there. Damn, that hurt. Ah ha ha ha!”

It was unclear whether he was in pain or happy, so Mitotsudaira gave into her emotions and glared at the idiot.

“Wh-why are you barging in while I’m changing!?”

“Judge,” replied Horizon.

She looked back and forth between Mitotsudaira and the idiot, slowly removed the door with her gravitational control, held the door, and glared out from behind it.

“Y-you thief of a wolf!”

“Um...the door? Really, the door! I’m changing! Why are you even here!?”

“We came to see you before you could hide your injuries, Nate.”

His casual comment caused the side table to slip from her hand. She had been using her powerful grip to hold it in her palm, so it flew from her hand like a grape from its skin.

“Ah.”

In her rush to grab the falling side table, the sheets fell from her body and the idiot let out a shout.

“Owah!”

An instant later...

The idiot returned while laughing again, but he did not stop at the entrance and actually entered the room. Horizon followed and the scent of their hair filled Mitotsudaira with confusion and another realization.

...They are safe.

That was likely the others’ doing. She called herself a knight, but she had barely managed to hold off a single enemy.

In that theatre space, she had lost consciousness from lack of oxygen after holding Walsingham in the water, but Naito had been healing her in a carriage when she had woken up.

From what Naito had said, she had been sleeping atop the fountain's stone structure along with the broken silver chains. It seemed Walsingham had withdrawn by releasing the theatre space.

...But based on the damage we took, that was essentially my loss.

According to Kimi, Naruze's chicken meat had been badly injured, a wife had rescued her, and Tenzou had fallen for a girl and had a foreign object inserted into him. However, Mitotsudaira did not understand what that crazy person was talking about. Tenzou may have been unable to resist and committed a minor crime, but Naruze had been fighting without her Weiss Fräulein. It seemed the Technohexen had lost, but she must have done enough seeing as their king was unharmed.

...And here I am pretending to be a knight.

She could not bear to face them and it showed in her actions. While pretending to hide her body, she pulled up the sheet and buried half her face in the white cloth's scent.

As she hung her head, a hand suddenly touched her hair. She gasped and trembled as she felt a grasping and stroking sensation reach her scalp through the hair.

"There, there, there. You put up a good fight."

She took in a breath and tensed her shoulders at the idiot's voice.

"N-no, I did not."

"Judge. But it was thanks to your efforts that Toori-sama and I were able to speak with each other and that Toori-sama was able to decide on his policy for Musashi."

"I didn't-..."

“To be more precise, if any one person had been missing, Toori-sama would likely have become my shield.”

“Ehhh? Couldn’t you get them with your Logismo Oplo?”

“We cannot rely on that.”

Mitotsudaira relaxed her shoulders and looked up. The idiot was sitting on the side table and stroking her head while Horizon was sitting on the bed.

Horizon’s calm eyes were looking directly towards her and the automaton’s lips parted.

“By the way, Mitotsudaira-sama, I must apologize. We all had a discussion a moment ago and we determined that your excessive excitement that led to this dreadful fate was due to the yakiniku power from four days ago that had yet to fully fade. I think I may have cooked too much meat for you.”

“Listen, all of you out there in the corridor! I’m going to remember this for later!!”

Shouts and fleeing footsteps filled the corridor.

“Honestly,” she sighed as the noises faded into the distance.

She held the sheet in her left arm, raised her head, and removed his hand from her hair with a twinge of regret. She then fixed her hair behind her.

“I insist on attending the party. I cannot let England underestimate us.”

“Are you that excited about being able to eat as much you want? Just make sure to rest afterwards, Nate.”

She did not feel like responding. As a knight, there were times when she should listen to her king’s ideas and times when she should not. That was especially true in an area that could become enemy territory at a moment’s notice.

...The kingdom of non-humans. It certainly lives up to the name in its way of completely transforming without warning.

She felt her awareness had grown soft to be thinking that now.

“Hey, hey, hey. No getting bloodthirsty, Nate. You were growling deep in your throat.”

“I was not.”

She was brought back to reality in an instant, but then she detected a scent she recognized from her clan’s company.

“Why do you have nail polish?”

The idiot lined up a few different colors on the edge of the side table.

“Nate, Cool White will work, won’t it?”

“Judge. That would be the one I would use.”

He grabbed her hand and she grew flustered despite knowing what he was going to do

“Eh? Wait. What are you doing?”

“Don’t get so down, Nate.”

The nails of the hand he held were split.

“Sis told me that werewolf races have nerves and blood vessels in their nails, just like dogs and wolves do in their claws. With your nails split, you couldn’t use the silver chains or fight very well, could you? So don’t get so down. I’ll heal them by hardening them with nail polish just like sis said to.”

“Eh? Wait... Kimi!”

She turned toward the corridor and saw Kimi making some form of gesture with both hands. Mitotsudaira initially thought she was saying to give up, but then she formed two large arcs in the space in front of her chest.

...I-I don't understand at all!!

Her astonishment created enough of an opening for the idiot to start with the nail polish.

“~ ~ ~!”

She trembled as the small brush traced across the nerves in her split and sensitive nails. It felt like having her wound licked, but she also felt heat and an itching pain she could not ignore.

A ticklish feeling spread from her fingertip to the core of her body.

...I-I have to resist.

If she opened her mouth, she would never live down the noise she produced. And if she acted reflexively to this sensation, the idiot would be seriously injured. The most she could do was pull in the sheet with her left hand and bite down on it to endure.

He then did the next finger.

“...!!”

“Oh, it's going on there good. Okay, I'm gonna do the other fingers and the other hand. ...Does it hurt?”

She did not have the leeway to answer, but he gave a small smile.

“Yeah. Stay, stay. Bear with it, okay?”

He chose for her, but she could not decide whether she should speak up in protest or not.

As she continued to bite the sheet, Horizon pulled an apple and knife from somewhere and began peeling the apple. A plate had already been prepared, but Horizon's action seemed odd to Mitotsudaira.

...Huh?

Horizon was peeling the apple with the blade pointed outwards and the idiot soon noticed as well.

"Horizon, that's my moms' special skill, so you probably shouldn't copy it."

"Really? But she can peel the entire apple in a single, long slice like this."

"She's a legit samurai, so she has some weird policy about never pointing a blade toward herself. Most people point it inwards cause it's easier."

Mitotsudaira nodded in agreement and spoke up despite thinking it was unnecessary.

"The best method is to twist the hand holding the knife and press the apple against it while twist- hyan!"

"Twisthyan? Mitotsudaira-sama, I do not understand your instruction."

The idiot was working on her ring finger, so she could not reply. She could only bite on the sheet as she felt a ticklish sensation scratching through her body from below her fingernail and down her arm.

"Foolish brother," called Kimi from the corridor. "Do her toenails as well. Inconsistency is the sign of a terrible woman."

...Eh? My feet too!?

She looked up hesitantly and found him frowning.

"Hmm. I don't think I'd do very good with the feet."

"What? Why not?"

“When sis gets out of the bath, she has me do it because she’s too stiff, but it must tickle because she always starts laughing, falls out of her chair, and kicks me.”

...Wh-what have you been doing!?

While she thought that for a variety of reasons, he tilted his head.

“Should I do it?”

She thought on that question for a moment, covered her head in the white sheet, and silently stuck her feet out from under the cloth.

The sun set and 5:00 PM approached.

Lights were already lit in the hall leading from Oxford Academy’s entrance.

The light seemed to warm the chill of evening and the center of the hall was left empty while the four sides were filled with tables, platters of food, and plates.

The hall continued far beyond the queen’s seat of honor. The ceiling was tall and darkness filled the farthest areas which reached over 100 meters back. At the border between the darkness and the queen’s seat, the emblem of England and Oxford hung as a flag and provided color to the entire hall.

Musicians wearing English uniforms were lined up on either side of the hall and were currently tuning their instruments.

“ ... ”

A group appeared from the left corridor. Those representatives of England wore formal uniforms and included the old, young, male, female, and non-human. They shrugged, slapped each other on the back, and gradually filled the hall with noise and motion.

However, they all looked toward the corridor on the right as they passed the time.

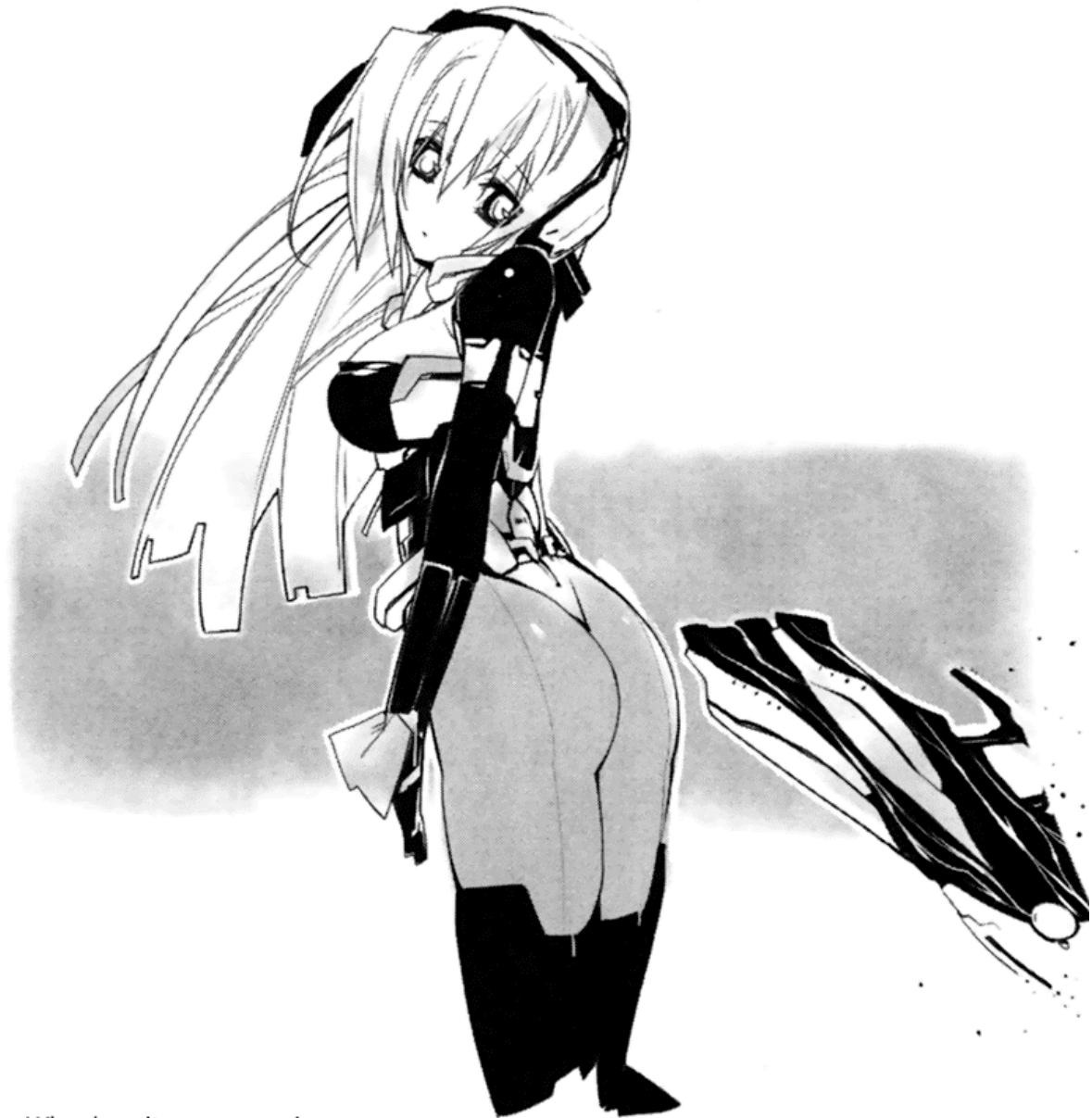
That corridor led to a waiting room where Musashi's representatives would be preparing.

The party preparations were complete, so there was nothing to do but wait for it to start.

Chapter 42: Those who Move About in the Wings of the Stage

CHAPTER 42

"Those who Move About in the Wings of the Stage"



Why does it grow so noisy
Even though
I was not trying to cause a commotion
Point Allocation (Individuality)

Why does it grow so noisy

Even though

I was not trying to cause a commotion

Point Allocation (Individuality)

The party preparations were complete in Oxford Academy's hall, but there was still time until six o'clock when the party began.

The Musashi representatives – especially the girls – were not used to dressing up and were spending the full time available to prepare.

But as the girls showed their outfits off to each other in the hall-sized girls' changing room, Masazumi was lost in thought.

...So this is the outfit the Aoi sister prepared for me.

In the carriage along with Aoi and Horizon, she had been handed a wicker basket and told, "Masazumi, yours is on the right, Horizon's is in the center, and my foolish brother's is on the left."

"This does look like it would suit me," she commented upon checking inside.

The Aoi sister had already finished changing and left. Masazumi had assumed she would head to the hall, but she had said otherwise.

"Heh heh heh. I finished with time to spare, so I'll go check out the surrounding passageways. If we wait until something happens, it will be too late to find an escape route for everyone."

That would normally be Tenzou's job, but he and Naruze had been put to sleep and returned to the Musashi for healing. Kimi was skilled in dealing with others, so she was indeed ideal for reconnaissance.

Beyond the others who were relying on the Aoi sister, Asama and Mitotsudaira were helping Horizon into her dress. As an automaton, she had black flexible parts from the top of her chest to the neck and on both arms. From a shape and color perspective, one had to consider whether or not to hide those black parts when selecting a dress for her, but the Aoi sister had selected a black sleeveless dress with white camellia-shaped ribbons and other decorative cloths. It also had a few golden lines.

...According to the Testament descriptions, the Fairy Queen liked the color black and often wore gold dresses.

Masazumi had heard that the queen's subordinates had all chosen black outfits to match the queen, so she felt the Aoi sister had made the right decision as a guest. The decorative camellias were an Asian flower that did not exist in Europe and the Testament descriptions said nothing about the seeds having made their way over. As such, selective breeding had long been practiced with the Far Eastern ones and it was the representative example of a Far Eastern flower.

...Overall, the Aoi sister is surprisingly reliable.

She likely understood that this was more or less Horizon's debut appearance.

The diplomatic trio of Futayo, Suzu, and Adele had finished changing, so they too helped dress Horizon and groom her hair. Horizon may have felt the need to dress up, but she did not seem to grasp the point.

“You seem to be having trouble with the area around my waist, so how about I take apart my torso? My parts have individual survival lockdown functions, so I can remove my limbs or head for about half an hour without issue. See?”

When she removed her left arm at the shoulder, everyone froze. Asama was the first to react.

“W-wow, Horizon. How about we save that for the end-of-the-year talent show!?”

“Well done, Horizon-sama,” added Futayo. “I see you have developed an innovative new anti-decapitation technique. I never thought of removing the body part before it can be cut.”

“I’m used to seeing that with mobile shells, but this is like the person inside doing it,” commented Adele.

Aren’t you supposed to be disturbed by that? thought Masazumi as Horizon reattached her arm.

“...?”

Masazumi frowned when she saw something strange behind the automaton.

“Eh?”

Something was floating behind Horizon’s waist and Masazumi recognized it.

...But why is that floating there?

She approached in confusion and everyone turned toward her.

“Um, you’re too late,” said Asama with a tilt of the head. “We’ve already finished the best parts.”

That’s not what I’m doing, she thought while reaching for what floated behind Horizon.

“Can you see this?”

She indicated it with her hand.

“This is the hilt of Lype Katathlipse, the Logismoï Oplo that went missing.”

Asama saw it floating behind Horizon. The object Masazumi crouched down and touched was indeed a white and black hilt. But why was just the hilt floating there? She did not understand, so she thought and finally reached a conclusion.

“Masazumi, is this some sort of illusion?”

“I didn’t hide it here.”

As everyone watched in confusion, Horizon herself did the same.

“...?”

She frowned in confusion as she looked at it. She turned toward it, but after a short delay, it followed her like a tail. “Ah,” said Masazumi as it left her hand and rotated to match Horizon’s movement. It looked something like a cat chasing its own tail.

...Its coordinates seem fixed to Horizon’s position.

But when Masazumi frantically grabbed it, she was able to hold it back with the gentleness of a spring gathering tension. Rather than fixed coordinates, it seemed to follow her half-automatically. Masazumi let go and it slowly started rotating behind Horizon.

Just as Asama prepared to give her opinion on this phenomenon, Horizon slowly reached for the floating hilt and pulled the entire thing out.

Silently and with gentle resistance, she produced Lye Katathlipse and placed it on a nearby table.

“...?”

She placed a hand on her chin and tilted her head. As an automaton, she seemed unable to accept this unexplained phenomenon connected to her, but Mitotsudaira raised a hand and gave her opinion.

“When you visited me earlier, you produced an apple and knife. Where did those come from?”

Horizon stopped moving. Eventually, she brought a hand to her forehead and mimed placing objects on the table and arranging them.

...Oh, she's recreating her actions with the apple.

After gathering the imagined plates, she brought them behind her.

She stopped once more and finally spoke with an emotionless voice.

“Really, now. What is going on, everyone?”

“Sh-she passed it on to us!!”

Anyway, thought Asama. I know what this is.

“It goes by a variety of names depending on how the space is made, but I think she has created an alternate space for storage. It is the same technique Naito and Naruze use for their Technohexen outfits.”

“Horizon has been sleeping a lot lately, so do you think that was in order to install this ability? You could say she was repeatedly installing and rebooting,” said Naito. “She had optimized the entire process, so she didn’t even notice she was putting stuff in there. It was a part of her body, so she didn’t have to think about it.”

“Most likely,” agreed Asama while remembering something else she had noticed. “Horizon, you took part in the divine chat during the meeting between Lord Howard and Shirojiro on the diplomatic ship. At the time, I assumed you had made a contract somewhere, but you hadn’t, had you?”

The silver-haired automaton frowned and brought a hand to her chin once more. After a moment, she again recreated the moment by tapping at the empty air with her right hand.

“...?”

But nothing appeared there. She tried the same thing a few times, but the result was the same. Adele finally stopped her.

“This probably means that ability hasn’t been fully installed yet. Sign frames are at the base of the interface, so it’s probably especially complicated. The next time you fall asleep, it might be for this.”

“Judge. I have determined the same. They do say sleeping helps a child grow.”

I suppose that is what it means for an automaton to “grow”, thought Asama. And this isn’t a mechanical upgrade. It’s more like the automatically developed updates of an intelligent weapon’s internal spell.

She felt the same was happening to Horizon.

...But her ability goes farther than normal.

The event four days prior had happened so naturally that she had not noticed, but approval from a divine chat’s administrator was required to participate.

Nevertheless, Horizon had cut in without it. The Asama Shrine managed the divine network, so Asama’s sign frame system was highly secure.

...And yet she managed to cut in like it was nothing.

She belatedly realized just what it meant for Horizon to be an automaton built by Lord Motonobu, ruler of Mikawa. If Asama increased the security, Horizon would most likely update to match it.

“So, um, Horizon? Once you’re able to produce sign frames, please tell me. If I register you, it will cut down on problems and-...”

She trailed off because Horizon had crouched down and stuck her right arm into empty space up to the elbow. She rummaged around inside with a searching look and eventually placed some objects on the table.

“Oh? This is the book I was reading. And this is...a pillow?”

...Isn’t she being a little too careless with this!?

She also produced a folded handkerchief, a textbook, a flyer for a sale, and some other things.

“Are you using it as a trash can?”

“Does it have a lid? You brought out some soap, but did the bath water flow inside? Is everything in their okay?”

As everyone gave their comments, Horizon hit the jackpot.

“Oh? What’s this?” she said. “Judge. Look. A bowl full of seaweed.”

Asama and the other girls fled from the room.

Twenty minutes later, those gathered in the party hall spoke up as someone arrived.

A stir filled the crowd as someone in a blue dress entered from the Far Eastern corridor. The blue showed off the long black hair and the dress had a simple design with few decorations and a second layer of white at the bottom of the skirt. To indicate peaceful intentions, the front of the skirt was clasped high, a decorative hat was worn deep over the face, and white cloths covered the neck and waist.

“Does that symbolize the clouds?”

The boys exchanged glances to hold each other in check.

“Long black hair and a flat chest. Is that Musashi’s rumored vice president?”

Many of them had been too far away to see during the daytime opening ceremony and a line of boys formed in front of the blue dress. Just as the dress gestured for them to approach by kissing the outfit’s white glove, Asama in her red suit-style Far Eastern outfit arrived with the others.

“Huh?” they reacted upon seeing the situation in progress.

While cheers washed over them, the girls exchanged frowning glances.

“Who is that?” asked a suspicious voice.

That was when Kimi appeared from the opposite corridor wearing a red dress. She wiped her hands with a handkerchief and spotted Asama’s group.

“You all are late. I had enough time to go sightseeing around the academy.”

“Well, um...”

Kimi followed Asama’s gaze and noticed the blue dress that had drawn a line of boys.

“Oh?”

She too tilted her head for a moment, but she actually called out to the blue dress.

“Foolish brother, why are you wearing Masazumi’s dress?”

“Eh?”

Everyone stopped moving and the blue dress removed the hat and a wig to reveal Toori’s frowning face below.

“C’mon, sis. Don’t give it away right when things are getting interesting.”

The hall filled with screams and shouts of protest.

While the boys hung their heads and fell to their knees, Masazumi finally grasped what was going on after entering late.

“That would explain why my outfit was a male ceremonial uniform with pants.”

It was white, likely as a contrast to Horizon’s black. As for how they had gotten mixed up...

...When the Aoi sister explained the contents of the basket, I never checked whether it was right and left from my perspective or hers.

While the idiot had taken the dress without question, she was still at fault. However, that idiot was now standing amid the unmoving crowd of boys and he spread the leg portion of the dress.

“Being a girl is hard work! The waist is super tight and the crotch and butt are...how should I put it? They sit weird. The position doesn’t feel right. It can’t be like this all the time can it? Well, can it?”

...Please don’t ask that while tapping on the shoulders of the people hanging their heads.

At any rate, Masazumi was glad Mitotsudaira had prepared a white version of her inner suit. The black camellia ribbons on the chest and ceremonial sword seemed like a bit much, though.

...I swapped out the neck parts, but how does that work with a Mouse?

The baby anteater was asleep on the transport ship to heal and Asama had said it would not awaken for a while, but she was still worried.

The Aoi sister walked over, ignored Asama’s group while humming and smiling, and stopped in front of Masazumi. She suddenly lifted the other girl’s chin with a finger.

“Judge. The scar is gone. Did Mitotsudaira do that?”

She can tell? thought Masazumi, but it was likely part of her skill with makeup.

She soon looked away from Masazumi.

“Asama, Adele, I will remain with Masazumi during the party, so you two stick with Mitotsudaira and Suzu. If they try to take any food, you get it for them. As we do not have official positions, our job is to wait on them.”

The sullen look on Mitotsudaira’s face suggested there was more to it than that. It was hidden with foundation, but her usual vigor was lacking. Asama could use purification spells, so she could provide support if something happened.

Masazumi asked the Aoi sister a question as Horizon entered the hall.

“Aoi sister, are you sure you shouldn’t stick with Horizon? And shouldn’t you have been the one to dress her?”

“Horizon has my foolish brother as a partner, so there is nothing to worry about. As for dressing her, I can enjoy that any day. Also, I have no official position, so she might have to change clothes for official business when I am not around in the future. She needs to be able to change even when she is all on her own.”

The Aoi sister pulled a change purse from between her breasts and stuck it between Horizon’s breasts.

“Wait a second,” said Masazumi while glaring at her.

“What is this?” asked Horizon with a tilt of the head.

“If a waiter does something for you, give them an arbitrary tip from there. You don’t need to if they are doing it as a favor, though. If you can’t determine which it is, ask my foolish brother, okay?”

“Judge.”

Horizon nodded and the Aoi sister rubbed her hair with her eyes bent in a smile.

“I’m sure you’ll head out to enjoy the festival tomorrow as well, so you can use that then too. My foolish brother will undoubtedly insist all his money is for buying souvenirs for everyone, so use that to enjoy yourselves. Think of it as an allowance from your big sister.”

“Stop showing off.”

Mitotsudaira glared at her, but the Aoi sister smiled indifferently.

“This is my special privilege.”

“Why?” asked Horizon. “Why are you being so kind to me, Kimi-sama?”

“Because you’re going to be my little sister.”

“That has yet to be determined.”

“That doesn’t matter.” The Aoi sister stroked along Horizon’s cheek and down to her chin. “Women can invest in their dreams for what others will become, while men can only invest in themselves. If I invest in you, it makes my dream more likely to come true. Al-so.” She tapped on Horizon’s cheek with each syllable of that word. “Come to our place on the surface sometime soon. You don’t have to come with my foolish brother. There’s something I want to show you.”

“Judge. You mean the shop owner’s house, don’t you? As long as it would not be a bother.”

As the two spoke, Asama and Mitotsudaira’s expressions stiffened. *What is it?* wondered Masazumi with a glance, but the two of them frantically shook their heads.

...*What’s that about?*

Next, another stir filled the party hall. A girl in a golden dress appeared from the England-side corridor.

“It’s Fairy Queen Elizabeth. She’s come out fully equipped.”



Elizabeth

The girl wore the color gold.

Her blade-shaped crown thrust out forward and her English girls' uniform was woven with golden cloth. Two decorated guards floated above each shoulder and blades over a meter long hung down from them.

Blades were also attached to the hard points on the back of her waist. The total of six blades and the spreading skirt gave her a butterfly-like silhouette.

She moved gently and was accompanied by maids. Without circling to the hall's seat of honor, she simply stood in the center.

"Now, then."

She turned toward the gathering of Musashi students. She smiled once she spotted Musashi's princess amid the dresses and ceremonial clothing, but her eyebrows soon moved slightly.

"Where is Musashi's chancellor and student council president?"

"I'm right over here. What is it?"

Elizabeth turned around and found the boy in a blue dress who was already eating meat served on the bone. His crotch contained a tarbosaurus made from hard chocolate.

She stared at him for a good five seconds.

"Is Musashi's representative a pervert!?"

"We can't argue against that," muttered the entire Musashi group while hanging their heads.

Meanwhile, the queen reached the throne at the seat of honor and glanced over at the idiot who was being dragged away by Asama and Futayo.

“Now, then.”

She cleared her throat once and slowly but clearly spoke.

“For the advancement of our two nations and academies, we will hold tonight’s party and inter-academy meeting.”

Chapter 43: Storyteller in the Hall

CHAPTER 43

"Storyteller in the Hall"



If differences are not aligned via compromise
What do they become?

Point Allocation (Destination)

If differences are not aligned via compromise

What do they become?

Point Allocation (Destination)

A girl stood in a stone room.

She had long, braided blonde hair and scars covered her skin. This was Mary and she wore England's female uniform.

She turned toward the door behind her. That door was tightly shut and the intelligent closet which acted as her maid could be heard descending the stairs.

“The southwestern tower of the Tower of London. I’ve finally returned.”

She sighed and looked around at the nostalgic scenery. She had been here not just after being born, but also when moving about England for the history recreation.

...And during the conflict over my right to the throne as the queen of Scotland, I fled to England.

This had always been her room.

The bed, table, and closet were the same as they had always been.

“Only the shutters and curtains seem to have been touched.”

She knew who had done that.

“Elizabeth.”

She sighed again.

“In the name of recreating Mary’s travels around England, you gave me quite a bit of free time before my execution. But you would occasionally come here and

pretend to be me for the people. What would they say if they knew that? They would probably talk about how much the queen loves the theatre.”

Elizabeth was her twin sister and the incredibly powerful Fairy Queen. Mary had heard it said their mother Anne Boleyn had chosen the Celtic fairy royal family to ensure she would receive that second name.

The few members of the fairy royal family had wished for that forbidden relationship with a human for good reason.

...Fairies are ultimately an ether race, so they can only exist in the ley lines no matter how dense they become.

Just as it was difficult for humans to access the ley lines, the high-level ether races such as fairies had difficulty accessing physical objects. They would simply become a ley line with a form and will of its own.

That was why fairies periodically had relations with humans. The child born from such a relation would have great ability in spirit spells and could rule over both worlds.

That was why fairies would spirit people away.

But, thought Mary as she looked to the wall.

A portrait of two women hung on that wall.

“Henry VIII’s first wife, Queen Catherine.”

And Anne Boleyn.

Mary’s mother was Catherine according to her inherited name, but her real mother was Anne.

She looked at her two mothers.

“I was not born from my mother and the mother who did give birth to me died from the great burden of birthing two children. Yet my power is far weaker than my sister’s. And...”

And...

“Since I took many lives in the history recreation, I suppose it really is a type of salvation for the recreation to continue. Can I be proud of returning to the ley lines and protecting England from there?”

She took a step toward the desk on the western wall. After two steps, she saw what sat on top of the wooden desk.

“My diary.”

The diary on the desk was covered in dust.

Mary smiled bitterly when she noticed.

“You could have read it, you know? I didn’t write anything bad in there. I had nothing bad to write.”

She approached, opened it, and found messy writing. She flipped through the pages and occasionally found dried flowers between the pages.

The years and dates were sporadic.

“I only wrote in this when I came here.”

But the writing gradually grew neater, the number of entries grew, and sudden color appeared at one point.

That page contained a dark red smear from a finger.

“ ... ”

She subconsciously rubbed the scar above her nose, stopped flipping through the pages, and lowered her head.

“ ‘Save you from anything.’ ”

She almost seemed to swallow the words and she closed her eyes. After taking a breath, she opened them and smiled with the ends of her eyebrows lowered.

“Did I...”

She left the desk and walked to the bed.

“Did I accomplish anything outside of the history recreation?”

She lowered her head and placed a hand on the bed, but she finally gave a laugh that sounded like a small cough.

The trembling laugh had a gagging sound mixed in and she lowered her shoulders. She covered her face with her right hand and stroked the sheets with her left.

“Oh, no.”

She gave another coughing laugh.

“I’ve gotten so used to making my own bed.”

As that comment fell to the bed, she heard a bell. That bell indicated the arrival of night and it had a special meaning today.

The party at Oxford Academy had ended.

“Now, then.”

That voice was quiet, but it rang clearly through the silent stone hall.

The voice belonged to the Fairy Queen who sat on the throne located atop a few steps at the seat of honor.

Dudley and Cecil stood to her left and right while the rest of the Trumps were gathered to her right at the bottom of the steps.

Someone kneeled on the red carpet in the center with a hand to her chest.

“Allow me to introduce myself once more. I am Honda Masazumi, student council vice president and representative of Musashi Ariadust Academy.”

The girl in the white uniform stood and looked to the wall on her right and to the queen’s left.

Far Eastern Princess Horizon and Futayo were there along with the treasurer, his aide, and the 2nd, 3rd, and 6th special duty officers.

After nodding toward them and Asama who was in the corridor to the waiting room, Masazumi turned back to the queen.

“With that complete,” she said to the queen. “Let us begin the meeting between England and the Far East’s academies.”

Two figures moved within the hall being used as a meeting room.

Horizon lined up to Masazumi’s right to indicate her authority lay behind the girl’s words and Asama stood behind Masazumi while opening a sign frame with her and Masazumi’s shared settings.

“As our secretary is not present, a member of the Asama Shrine would like to take his place.”

“Testament,” replied the queen.

Asama bowed but did not name herself. She did not hold an official position and was merely filling in to manage the sign frame.

Asama: “Wow. This is really exhausting all of a sudden.”

Silver Wolf: “If you can talk like that, you must not be under too much of a burden.”

Everyone had already opened their sign frames and that went for England’s students as well as Musashi’s.

The queen even opened a simple sign frame by her hand. Seeing that, Masazumi took a breath and spoke.

“Who will make their demands first?”

“Testament. It makes little difference because we will likely both begin from the same point.”

Elizabeth looked at her sign frame as she spoke from the throne.

“This all comes down to whether the Musashi will be allowed to leave port.”

“Whether the Musashi will be allowed to leave port, hm?”

...That certainly is the beginning of the issue.

They had to receive permission to leave and she opened her mouth to lead in to that.

...I have no choice but to go first.

She knew it put her at a disadvantage, but she also felt it could be her first foothold.

“Listen.”

She wanted permission for the Musashi to leave port and she spoke to that end.

“Currently, England is not allowing the Musashi to leave port in the name of protecting it until its safety can be assured. I would like for you to repeal that decision.”

Bertoni and Heidi had already given her the trade and economic reports and documents related to the issue and she now gave the political reasoning.

“After all, Musashi is currently acting as an independent nation and academy to gather the Logismo Oplo in order to stop the Apocalypse. That is Musashi’s objective and we have already notified the Testament Union as such via K.P.A. Italia and Tres España. England’s actions are obstructing that objective of ours.”

“And?” The Fairy Queen rejected her request and continued speaking. “If England’s actions are obstructing Musashi’s objective, it means Musashi’s objective is obstructing England’s intentions. We both have our own objectives. If the achievement of one means the destruction of the other, the inter-academy rules do not apply. After all, if we were to unilaterally accept Musashi’s demands and withdraw all of our own demands, we would be forced to do the same when faced with the other nations in the future. If our objectives are in conflict and cannot both be achieved, they cannot be used as a bargaining chip. ...In other words, our objectives are parallel. They cancel each other out equally, Musashi Vice President. You cannot negotiate with that.”

She paused for a moment.

“But even if this is a parallel argument, I do not wish for a parallel that simply cancels out everything we have. Given the future that awaits us, England must benefit here. If possible, I would like to create a parallel that we can exchange for mutual benefit. Instead of equally cancelling out, I would like an equal exchange. On that note, you need to remember that the greatest benefit for England would be for the Musashi to stay here permanently.”

She doesn't keep anything hidden, thought Masazumi.

It had been the same during the negotiation between Bertoni and Lord Howard. The English man had boldly attacked head on.

She checked on her classmates' reactions.

Marube-ya: "That really pisses me off."

Me: "Auge-chan, you really start talking like a child when you aren't in charge."

Uqui: "Well, if this doesn't work out, I just have to announce the beginning of inquisition time and cause a commotion, so keep going without worrying too much."

Flat Vassal: "In other words, this will turn to all-out war if it doesn't work out."

...Th-this isn't good!

The way Futayo was crossing her arms and giving meaningful nods only seemed to raise the level of danger.

I need to distract everyone, she thought while realizing she was not sure who her real enemies were.

"Your Majesty, we have now stated what our objective is. We wish to exchange what value we have rather than cancelling it out. For island nations such as the Far East and England, trade is a very important term."

In that case...

"How about we specify just how saving us from the Apocalypse via the Logismo Oplo is equivalent to England protecting Musashi?"

The Musashi students listened as Masazumi began to speak.

Gold Mar: "Isn't this being broadcast outside as an official meeting?"

Marube-ya: "Judge. And as a part of the festival. That's why we can't do anything too absurd and why we tied up Toori-kun earlier. Some things would be dangerous to send out over divine transmission."

Asama: “Vice President: Which is why Aoi has been divine transmi-shunned.”

Asama: “That wasn’t me! It wasn’t! Masazumi, please focus on the meeting!”

Asama: “Vice President: I was a little unsure what to say next and I just couldn’t help myself.”

Wise Sister: “The twist? It was Asama playing both parts!!”

Asama: “No, it wasn’t! It really wasn’t!”

That reply only made the others suspect it really was her and Masazumi took a breath.

“First, if the Musashi cannot leave port, we cannot gather the Logismoï Oplo. What does England propose as an equivalent trade for that?”

“Testament.” Elizabeth nodded. “Let me say something first. Gathering the Logismoï Oplo means to remove that firepower from the nations that possess them and the order in which they are removed depends on Musashi’s movements. In that case...”

In that case...

“If you retrieve England’s before our war with Tres España, we will have inferior firepower to them and their one remaining Logismoï Oplo. Also, it is thought Musashi will travel to Hexagone Française or M.H.R.R. next, but which comes first? Those two nations are fighting the Thirty Years’ War and which one you remove the Logismoï Oplo from first will certainly change the situation and progress of the war.”

So...

“Removing the Logismoï Oplo will bring chaos to the nations that currently use them to maintain a balance of firepower. Thus, preventing Musashi from removing them is a benefit to all those nations.”

“But,” said Masazumi while typing to the others that she had expected this. “That is a benefit to England and those other nations. That is different from stopping the Apocalypse, which is the Far East’s proposed benefit.”

Silver Wolf: “Judge. The Far East is proposing we stop the Apocalypse. That is a benefit to the future of the entire world. On the other hand, England’s proposal of international stability is a benefit in the present.”

So...

“The Far East’s proposed benefit and the benefit England has proposed to stop it do not match. We are acting to prevent a crisis that will occur in the future.”

Masazumi brought a hand to her chest and spread out her other hand to plead to the queen.

“We are prepared to receive any criticism in the present if it means avoiding that future crisis. England is certainly kind to protect us, but we wish for you to end that kindness for the common benefit of all nations.”

Gold Mar: “Seijun’s really in the zone. Oh, we just got some fan mail from Gachan’s underclassmen. ‘Have Masazumi-san turn around. I want to see the back of her outfit so I can use it in my next doujinshi.’ ”

Asama: “Vice President: Please stop!”

Despite saying that, Masazumi casually turned around and pretended to wipe dust from her clothes. Everyone gasped.

Silver Wolf: “Are you a performer?”

Asama: “Vice President: No, I just thought it would be wrong of a politician to refuse a normal student’s harmless request.”

Gold Mar: “I forgot to mention it, but it’s an all-out gay doujinshi.”

Asama: “Um, excuse me, but can you stop chatting so much? Look at the English students. They’re behaving properly.”

They all glanced over at the Trumps who were nodding with crossed arms while facing their sign frames.

As if in response, Elizabeth also nodded.

“So you say a future benefit does not match a present benefit?”

She took a breath.

“We have come across a difference in opinion.”

England’s divine chat was quite lively.

Drug Poet: “The lady is simply wonderful! Her enunciation is spectacular! Someone should make a statue of her! Perhaps a bust!”

Seal Boy: “A bust! The queen’s bust!”

Queen: “Heh heh heh. You certainly are excited, my friends. Even if you are simply flattering me, I am not foolish enough to reject your excitement. Keep it coming.”

☾ —: “...”

O’Malley: “W-Walter just posted!!”

Guard Dog: “Rare.”

The queen nodded. The Trumps site on England’s divine network had been receiving letters of support from the commoners and she raised her excitement even further by reading through them.

Afterwards, she faced Musashi’s vice president and spoke.

“Musashi looks to the future while England focuses on the present. Are you asking us to allow Musashi to leave because of that difference? But even if

Musashi is prepared to be damaged over that mission, that is an issue of your will and not one of actual damage. A sense of purpose will not eliminate that damage. No matter how you try to dodge the issue with this mission of yours, preventing actual damage to the Musashi is an actual benefit to Musashi.”

And so...

“I believe we have achieved a consensus concerning what benefits us in the here and now.”

“In that case,” said Musashi’s vice president. “How will England create something equivalent to the future benefit Musashi will provide for every nation? That future benefit is common to all nations, Musashi included. If you are to stop that, what equivalent future benefit do you propose to the world?”

Marube-ya: “Wow. Seijun’s really going all out! Get ‘em!”

...You’re going all out too.

But what mattered now was seeing how England would answer her question. She had a guess what that answer would be.

“A future benefit?” muttered the Fairy Queen as if to double check. “You say stopping the Apocalypse by gathering the Logismoi Oplo is a common benefit to the entire world and it does seem that will be lost if Musashi is stopped here. ...But is that really the case?”

...So she is bringing it to this.

The exact words Masazumi had expected came from the Fairy Queen’s lips.

“Listen. If you let the history recreation play out, the Peace of Westphalia will naturally occur. In that case, the different nations need only bring their Logismoi Oplo to that meeting. If they are gathered before that, you risk destroying the balance of power and slowing the history recreation. Do you understand? There is

an opportunity for the Logismoï Oplo to gather without Musashi doing so. By keeping the Musashi here, damage to the Musashi, the destruction of the international balance of power, and the possible delay to the history recreation will all be prevented. No matter how you look at it, England's protection is the most beneficial option."

Marube-ya: "Wow, that's a good argument! It pisses me off!!"

Asama: "Um, I think that's what a villain is supposed to say."

Masazumi was worried about what kind of business their treasurer was doing, but she was glad Heidi had plenty of energy.

...But the log of this chat will be given to our teacher and Principal Sakai, won't it?

She decided not to write anything too strange. Then again, all of that was normal for her class, so it was also possible they were used to dealing with it. By hitting them, in their teacher's case.

At any rate, Masazumi took a breath.

England's argument was not wrong and she understood their proposition was indeed beneficial.

However...

"I appreciate England's kindness, but Musashi cannot accept it."

"Oh? And why is that?"

"Let me ask this instead." She steadied her breathing. "Having the Far East gather the Logismoï Oplo has great meaning to the other nations beyond simply stopping the Apocalypse. Has England realized what that is?"

Masazumi snapped her right fingers and pointed to Horizon.

“Since Mikawa, the Far East names itself as a sovereign and independent nation under the rule of Princess Horizon. As its academy, Musashi Ariadust Academy is its representative.”

“And?”

A well-timed question, sensed Masazumi. This is part of the Fairy Queen's kindness. She gives me the proper timing to make a mental turn so I don't simply continue speaking all on my own.

After all, what she was about to say would reveal one aspect of Musashi's position, both to England and to the other nations.

...I'm going to say it.

The idiot who was their leader had decided on his stance that day. As vice president, getting cold feet would accomplish nothing. After all, that idiot was supporting her.

And so she spoke.

“Horizon Ariadust is our leader and one element of the Far East's sovereignty, but her emotions were made into the Logismoi Oplo. Musashi is gathering the Logismoi Oplo so that she is not exposed to imperfect slander. To put it another way, one could say the Far East's sovereignty is currently incomplete. As such, we cannot agree to simply having the other nations bring their Logismoi Oplo to the Peace of Westphalia. We must reject that in order for Princess Horizon to preserve the Far East's sovereignty.”

“Testament. Then let me ask you one thing.”

The queen was no longer asking for confirmation. She was going on the offensive.

Asama: “Vice President: Everyone, don't let this shake you.”

She hurriedly typed on the sign frame.

Asama: “Vice President: This next response could make us enemies of the entire world.”

The Fairy Queen bent back a bit as she asked her question.

“The Far East is gathering the Logismoï Oplo not to stop the Apocalypse but to assert your sovereignty as a fully independent nation. Is that correct?”

“Judge,” replied Masazumi. “It is only once we gather the Logismoï Oplo, establish our sovereignty, and stop the Apocalypse that we will hold a position equal to England and the other nations. And we will face all of you as such at the Peace of Westphalia.”

“In that case,” said the Fairy Queen. “Does the Far East intend to overthrow the Testament Union’s provisional rule and reclaim its dominion of the Divine States? And are you asking us all to forget about the Harmonic Unification War from 160 years ago?”

The Queen of England’s words and the image of Musashi’s vice president were being broadcast to many different nations.

Two people inside a large stone cathedral watched the motionlessness and quiet of the Queen’s question and the vice president’s silence. They were K.P.A. Italia’s Papa-Schola Innocentius and Vice Chancellor Galileo.

Galileo spoke as he watched Masazumi’s back on the widescreen *cornice firma*.

“Former boy, why has the vice president stopped moving instead of answering? Is she unsure how to answer?”

“Tes, tes, tes,” thrice muttered Innocentius before taking a drink from a water bottle. “Honestly, she made such a fuss about sovereignty against me and lost, but now she’s talking about making the Far East equal? She certainly likes talking big, doesn’t she? Hm?”

“What’s this, former boy? I thought you would be upset, but it seems not. If anything, you seem...”

“Testament,” replied Innocentius. “She is a foolish girl and she does not make excuses. Do you understand, Galileo? Right now, we are wondering how she could be crazy enough to claim independence. Most likely, the other nations are the same. Even Musashi and the various Far Eastern reservations are probably the same. There are probably some who are shouting for her to give the Fairy Queen her answer. Don’t you think? Hm?”

But...

“This girl is giving all of them the time they need to shout out and express their anger or doubt. Why is that, hm? The answer is simple. She knows people will be making those shouts of anger and doubt and she knows speaking in the middle of them will drown them out and reflexively bring out the next shout. Instead, she is remaining silent until they have spoken and calmed down.”

Honestly.

“Such a troublesome young girl, isn’t she? Hm?”

At the same time, two people sighed in the darkness as they watched the same divine transmission footage.

They sat at the desks by the window of Alcalá de Henares’s student council room. One was Chancellor and Student Council President Segundo and the other was Fusae who sat at the Chancellor’s Officers desk while operating the *cadena firma*. Fusae then turned to Segundo.

“Chancellor, should I call Ju here?”

“No, she’s probably watching it from home. Can you keep it a secret that I’m doing this? Please? A-and sorry about the office work, Fusae. Thanks for doing it.”

“I think you should choose once and for all between whether you want to stay out of the spotlight or do everything in the shadows.”

“Which does Takakane fall under?”

“Testament. Taka is the type who excels on the scene.” Fusae looked at the image of England before her. “But what do you think of the Far East’s intent to stand on equal footing with the other nations? The current provisional rule and academy system were created to put the Far East below everyone else so they could take responsibility for the Harmonic Unification War. But if they secure their sovereignty with the Logismo Oplo and become equal to the other nations...”

“Testament. The system of provisional rule will vanish. We will lose that postwar system that has lasted 160 years. It’s unthinkable,” muttered Segundo. “It could even shift from a postwar situation to a prewar one. I wouldn’t be able to say it if I was her.”

“Will Tres España be able to manage if that happens?”

“Manage? What do you mean?”

“Testament. I’m asking what happens if the provisional rule comes to an end. That will mean the other nations must leave the Far East and return to their original position in the outer world.” Fusae brought a hand to her cheek and sighed. “But the environment is still too harsh outside of the Far East and we do not have the power needed to prosper there. Settling of the Harmonic Divine States was almost a cooperative venture between the different nations, but the state of those nations would prevent us from cooperating when it comes to settling the outside world. We would most likely have to do so as individual nations which would make it nearly impossible. Real economic and agricultural crises would occur with no connection to the history recreation. Even if our spells and aerial ships function under that harsh environment, we still need footholds to achieve the self-sufficiency, trade, medicine, and transportation required for villages to survive and prosper. But due to the history recreation, we have not researched settlement techniques beyond what is needed for the New World.”

“Testament,” agreed Segundo. He too sighed and adjusted his sitting position. “England must be aware of that threat. The northern and western portions of the New World will be settled by England for the history recreation and they were still undeveloped regions at the Harmonic World stage. Due to a gate created by the environmental gods, the western ocean of the Harmonic Divine States was connected to Ezo on the eastern coast of the New World. During the destruction of the Harmonic World, a harmonic space including that gate appeared in the ocean west of Kyushu and it still exists to this day. That is what our trade vessels have been using to trade with the southern and eastern coasts of the New World, but...”

But...

“England’s attempts to settle the northern side of the New World using that gate have not been successful.”

Fusae displayed the results of England’s settling operations as designated by the Testament descriptions.

“According to the Testament descriptions, they send several settlement expeditions of several hundred each, but they are almost entirely wiped out due to the freezing and barren environment. They are then forced to rely on the land inhabited by the indigenous people. And the history recreation has had them actually take that kind of damage.”

The reason for this was simple.

“Tres España and Tres Portugal have settled the southern area which contains warm jungles measuring several hundred meters tall. It’s an environment where plants and other life can live. On the other hand, the northern area is either wetlands or freezing cold and dry, so it seems they have not even been able to grow edible plants. Potatoes would be able to grow there, but the history recreation has not given England free use of them yet, so their settlement expeditions truly have seen hell.”

So...

“If the provisional rule is removed, England will be far behind the other nations as it has been unable to settle in the New World. Of course, the same can be said of the majority of nations that have no technology for settling. They managed to settle in the Harmonic Divine States, but the actual world is much, much larger. Settling that will take a great number of citizens and a great number of engineering students to develop the technology. In which case...”

“Tres España and Portugal might have a chance due to our accumulated settlement technology. The only others with a chance to succeed are Qing-Takeda and P.A. Oda.”

“Actually, in our case...” Segundo held his head in his hands. “I’ve used so much of our treasury for the history recreation that we’re in no financial position for it.”

“What about the money Ju has saved up?”

“I used it all on the Grande y Felicísima Armada.”

“You aren’t trying to blame that on *us*, are you?”

After another sigh, Fusae operated the office *cadena firma*.

“Well, I more or less understand what you’re thinking, chancellor, but I don’t particularly like the method. And there are ways to take responsibility for that.”

“Will you keep it a secret?”

“I won’t tell anyone since I know that’s what you want.”

She then turned back to Musashi’s vice president on the *cadena firma*.

“But to get back on track, the great financial investment needed will prevent almost every nation from settling the outside world. In that case, the other nations will never forgive Musashi if the provisional rule is removed and those nations are given nowhere to go. So my question was also about what we would do then. But...”

But...

“This vice president has grown a lot more resolute since the Battle of Mikawa.”

As the people gave several different reactions, Masazumi stood in the meeting hall and yet was thinking of something other than what her answer would be.

...I'm here in order to discuss something quite important.

That had not been her impression before the meeting when she had been thinking of what to discuss. At the time, she had been too desperate in her attempts to eliminate any holes in her arguments and finding ways to handle any counterarguments.

But now that she had taken action and stood in the center of it all...

...I'm setting something quite large in motion.

She was speaking out about the state of the Far East and she was taking the leading role.

But here, the Far East did not simply refer to Musashi or the reservations. She was dealing with the “Far East” that included the archipelago once referred to as the Divine States and all the nations contained therein.

If the Far East was made equal to those other nations, it would overturn the entire “Far East” and therefore the entire world.

It sounded like something one would dream of, but she was actually discussing it and taking the leading role.

...I see.

She thought about herself.

She had her five senses and they were functioning properly with no changes, but one single thing was different.

...If I say something here, it will set the world in motion.

She wanted to say something good, she wanted to do something people would admire, she wanted to draw attention, and most of all, she wanted to be the one who spoke the words that would set the world in motion.

...But I must restrain my ambitions.

A result brought about by her excitement here was not what she truly wanted.

It was the same as buying a souvenir at a festival or on a trip and wondering why you had bought it upon returning home. It could act as a reminder of the excitement from that time, but...

...Setting the world in motion should not be a reminder of one's excitement.

Setting the world in motion to be proud of her own actions was getting her priorities reversed.

Look at your father, she told herself. He does so much in public and behind the scenes, but he doesn't brag about it.

He would sometimes arrive home after prime time when Purple☆Shikibu, a divine TV show full of self-deprecating humor, had just ended and she recalled his response when she had once asked what he had been doing.

“That is not for children to know. The most I can say is that I was at a meeting with the others.”

...If I can't show that much restraint, I can't call myself a proper politician.

She nodded twice and took a breath.

She faced forward where the Fairy Queen waited. Given the history of England, the queen's name would likely remain well known for a long time to come. Masazumi on the other hand had failed to inherit a name and this meeting was unlikely to be recorded in history.

...*Still*...

At the very least, she stood on the forefront of the world with this one comment.

“Judge. The Far East is willing to end the provisional rule of the other nations.”

In an instant, explosive shouts and silences meant to hide them appeared in various places.

But in the center of it all, Masazumi simply narrowed her eyes and smiled.

“ ... ”

She silently took a breath and nodded to accept the reactions she expected were being given throughout the world.

She then spoke without losing the smile.

“After all, our leader has already made up his mind.”

They had announced that at Mikawa too, but they now had a definite answer based on deep thought rather than mere momentum.

And she gave that answer.

“Let’s see who’s strongest.”

“This is no longer just to save your princess! Even if this is a meeting between academies, you are publicly declaring war against the world!”

Innocentius stood from his chair, but then looked to Galileo.

“Now she’s done it! Hm!?”

“You are rejoicing, former boy.”

Innocentius fell silent at that. He sat back down, crossed his legs, drank some water, looked in a random direction, and then glared forward in displeasure.

“Now she’s done it. Hm?”

“I think you should work to fix that personality of yours.”

“It’s called having individuality. But...” He then shook his head once. “When I was a kid, I hoped to become the Papa-Schola and start the crusades back up, but now a mere student is actually saying that kind of thing. The world really is coming to an end.”

Masazumi lightly spread her arms and spoke.

“There is no reason to grow cautious. We will simply use the system of war that is used to resolve conflicts between academies. After all, England and the other academies already have that as an option. Even under provisional rule, we too possess that option. The only reason we have not used it is because its use would mean all-out war with the other nations. As such, I have three things to say.”

She held up a finger on her right hand.

“As I previously proposed, the Far East will become a location of inter-academy exchange by making the reservations neutral and free markets.”

She raised another finger.

“The Far East’s right to war against other academies will be given only to Musashi and Mikawa which is now part of it.”

She raised her final finger.

“That right to war will be divided into the right to declare war and the right to wage war. The former is the right to begin a war with another academy and the latter is the right to fight in an existing war and to continue that war. However...”

Segundo spoke quietly within the dimly lit student council room.

“Are you using the state of war as a bargaining chip?”

He listened to Masazumi speak.

“Listen. Musashi is new to war, so we will not do anything reckless. As such...”

“Until the Logismo Oplo have been successfully gathered, Musashi will provisionally seal its right to declare war.”

“Masazumi-kun is causing trouble again. Don’t you think, ‘Musashi’-kun?”

“Is that really something to say while smoking at night, Sakai-sama? The real trouble is having to clean up the ashes afterwards. And I am already busy with the requests and questions Masazumi-sama has given me. Over.”

“Musashi” spoke from the bridge in front of Musashi Ariadust Academy. In the darkness of the night, she looked up at the faults of England.

“But is Masazumi-sama’s statement truly that troublesome? Over.”

“Judge. People have doubts. Especially when it comes to their connections with others. A lot of the time, a connection someone sees as valuable is not seen that way by history.”

Sakai looked down toward Remorse Way. Someone stood in that place that had become a crossroads during the Battle of Mikawa.

It was Oriotorai. She carried a long sword on her back and Horizon’s memorial was to her right.

“This really is troublesome,” muttered Sakai as he watched the teacher stare directly toward England. “The world will be forced to decide whether it wants to go to war with Musashi. If they return the Logismoï Oplo, that’s fine. But the Logismoï Oplo are a portion of Horizon and therefore of the Far East’s sovereignty, so it infringes our sovereignty to not return them.”

How would this play out?

“If that infringement of sovereignty can be ‘interpreted’ as an act of war, Musashi will be able to engage the academies that possess the Logismoï Oplo and go to war at any time. And not only will those nations lose the firepower of their Logismoï Oplo, but dealing with Musashi will fill them with unrest. Even if they don’t go to war, they still have to spend time in negotiations. They will be forced to send personnel to handle Musashi while also fighting their enemies. All that extra trouble might make the Logismoï Oplo not worth keeping around, but they would still need some compensation for giving it up.”

“Compensation? Over.”

“Judge,” answered Sakai while still watching Oriotorai’s back down below. “A sovereign nation needs to do more than wage war against the other nations. Masazumi-kun needs to tell them what we can do for them.”

Masazumi held her right hand out toward the Fairy Queen.

“First, I have this to say to England which acts as a neutral intermediary between the Far East and the Testament Union.”

She took in a breath.

“Musashi is prepared to form an alliance or sign a nonaggression treaty with any academy or nation that returns their Logismoï Oplo or with any nation that does not possess one.”

Marube-ya: “Does that mean...?”

Judge, silently replied Mitotsudaira.

Silver Wolf: “We will ally ourselves with the nations who return their Logismoï Oplo or do not have one and we will aid them in any war they have against a nation that refuses to return theirs.”

In other words...

Silver Wolf: “Musashi itself will make up for the collapse of the power balance that retrieving the Logismoï Oplo would create.”

“This is an equal exchange, Fairy Queen. As a part of the independent nation of the Far East, Musashi will do whatever it takes to retrieve our sovereignty and we will work to prevent any delays to the history recreation. I would like to choose England and Oxford Academy as our first partner in that alliance.”

Mitotsudaira saw the Fairy Queen nod in response to Masazumi.

Her lupine vision saw the sword-shaped crown move slightly and the queen gave a clear reply.

“I reject your offer.”

Seal Boy: “Ehhh!? You reject it!? C’mon, just accept it! Being allies with Musashi would be fun! I’m not sure how it’d be fun, but I’m sure all sorts of terrible things would happen!!”

O’Malley: “That’s exactly why we can’t do it.”

Mr. Death: “After all, we have ghastly little guarantee about this!”

As everyone watched, Elizabeth nodded. She gestured for Musashi’s vice president to lower her outstretched hand. She then rested her elbow on the right armrest and rested her cheek on the hand.

Queen: “Give me some excitement. You have five seconds.”

Drug Poet: “Yeah! That pose of ennui is so captivating, lady! So lovely! So lithe! So tantalizing! For short, so lo-li-ta!!”

Seal boy: “Lolita! Lolita!!”

Vice President: “S-s-s-s-stop abbreviating it like that.”

Cecil: “Dudley, don’t type like you talk.”

Plain Merchant: “Is there a mirror around here?”

The queen laughed and they all began repeatedly tapping the macro they had to post “long live the queen”. After nodding twice, the queen spoke to Musashi’s vice president.

“War, an alliance, a nonaggression treaty. Creating a relationship using the nation’s own power is indeed the greatest bargaining chip when dealing with another nation. If a nation’s power is seen as a combination of its finances, military might, human power, political power, and stability, I do admit Musashi’s power is appealing. But...”

But...

“The Musashi can travel freely through the sky and possesses a powerful stealth system. It is a dangerous existence. You are suggesting that it wage war and attempt to drive the other nations from the Far East. If the entire world that is the current Far East is to declare its independence, Musashi must be eliminated as the representative of the old Far East. Do you understand? If anything, you are the final boss of the old army we must face as the new. Perhaps that is why you possess the name of the Leviathan.”

Therefore...

“If Musashi is to act on its sovereignty, England will act accordingly. We will begin an all-out attack on Musashi and use this as a chance to exterminate your student council and chancellor’s officers. Prepare yourselves, my friends.”

The term “all-out attack” produced countless metallic noises deep in the corridors. Reserve troops were equipping themselves. The Trumps also prepared for battle with the Musashi force on the opposite wall.

But even as those on Musashi’s side lowered their stances, Musashi’s vice president spoke from the center.

“Everyone, wait. Oh, do I have to use ‘stay’ for Mitotsudaira!?”

“Of course not!” shouted back Mitotsudaira.

As the others from Musashi expressed their doubts, the vice president asked the queen a question.

“You say you will begin an all-out attack?”

“Testament. You can call it large-scale assault if you like. You can also note that every shot will hit.”

“Judge. Then let me ask this.”

Musashi’s vice president pointed behind her and toward the southern sky that could not be seen from the hall.

“England’s primary fleet is mostly made up of privateers and cannot cause decisive damage to the Musashi. Also, Sir Drake and the rest of your primary force should be out scouting Tres España. Not to mention that a naval fleet is a poor choice for attacking on land.”

As soon as she said that, England shook.

“...!?”

It was not just Oxford or the first level that shook. Dudley's eyebrows rose as the vibration resonated and grew to a great wave.

"I-i-i-i-it can't be!"

"But it is. Musashi is on standby to leave port."

"Judge. It has been a while, so controlling the internal pressure of the fuel transfer pipes was difficult. However, everyone did their very best. I will need to clean it all up afterwards, though. Over."

The early startup meant the consecutive activation of the various engines and that repeatedly shook the Musashi's giant form. A voice spoke in response to that trembling.

"Activating IZUMO-made surface ether engine Hull-Type Special #06 Susashizunami. Is this what you were waiting for, Sakai-sama? Over."

"Musashi" and Sakai watched as an ocean appeared around the Musashi.

The membrane-like ocean appeared on the surface of the hull below the water line. In an instant, the water line was submerged in the thin ocean and spray from waves began splashing into the air.

"Ohh," said Sakai as he nodded toward the roar of the sea. "It has almost no thickness, but aerial ships are pushed up by the ocean they infinitely create around themselves. I know it's used because it's the most efficient method for an ultra-heavy ship, but I just love how it looks."

"Thank you for your praise. Over."

"Musashi" bowed and looked toward the silhouette of Oxford straight ahead and above.

"I hope Masazumi-sama is also delighted. Over."

As the vibrations shook England, Musashi's vice president crossed her arms and nodded.

“The Musashi has yet to resupply its ether fuel, but it has enough for three days of normal cruising. IZUMO on the northern coast of Hexagone Française is two days away and England's main fleet can't catch up even if you call them back now.”

She then raised her eyebrows and spoke to the queen without fear.

“If you insist on not forming an alliance with us, the Musashi will move to another nation. There, we will simply perform the same negotiation as here. So...”

She intended to ask “what will you do?”, but a sudden action cut her off. Amid the slight vibration of the Musashi that resembled a mere noise, the Fairy Queen suddenly stood up.

“Show some respect, carefree girl whose name will not remain in history.”

Dudley immediately let out a shout.

“G-g-g-get down!!”

Light filled the hall.

Twin flower petals had been fired from Elizabeth's back, but they instantly increased in number, spread out, and grew like bird wings.

“...!!”

In an instant, they reached over one hundred meters behind her.

They were clusters of immaculate flower petals made from light, their silhouette resembled butterfly wings, and they filled the empty space that had taken up most of the hall.

“Lady, we are witnessing the very proof that you are the Fairy Queen!” cried Jonson while taking cover on the floor.

Elizabeth nodded and raised her right toes.

In response, something welled up from the floor. It was a group of 15 cm kobolds, but she merely lowered her toes without speaking a word.

“Understood.”

With that single word, the kobolds sank into the floor and a certain phenomenon occurred a moment after that.

The shaking in England stopped.

“ ... ”

The noise of Musashi starting up could be heard like the distant ringing of a whistle, but it lacked the shaking of England that should have accompanied it.

“Bluffs are meaningless,” said the Fairy Queen while spreading her wings. “I love the theatre, but I hate meaningless performances.”

Masazumi watched as the giant wings of light slowly vanished from the air before her.

...What was that?

England literally did as its queen wished. The queen had been born here, she was descended from the spirits that were born from the land’s ley lines, and the modifications to England’s crust had created a system for making efficient use of those ley lines.

...But that power is still extraordinary.

Around Masazumi, Asama had fallen to a sitting position on the floor and Futayo and Mitotsudaira were crouched down defensively. Those wings of light were likely a manifestation of the queen's inner Blessings, but it made Masazumi shudder to imagine what would happen if it were turned on them.

“Listen, you carefree people made up of humans and other similar races. Have you forgotten where you are and who I am? Is that why you are speaking as if on equal terms? This is England, the country of fairies, spirits, and ghosts and I am the Fairy Queen who rules it.”

The Fairy Queen spoke as the wings of light were replaced by empty darkness behind her.

“Have you forgotten? England has Ex. Caliburn. In addition to defense, it can be used against the Musashi if it leaves port. As such, I will command the all-out attack against Musashi.”

And...

“If I am in command, there is another command I can give.”

“And that is?”

“Testament,” she replied. “I will have our ally of Holland intercept the Musashi before it arrives at IZUMO. Once England's main fleet returns to pursue you, we will request a temporary break in our history recreation with Tres España and we will request assistance from Hexagone Française and M.H.H.R. Then, each of those nations will work together to sink the Musashi.”

“ ... ”

“Needless to say, England currently holds a neutral position between Musashi and the Testament Union nations, but that does not mean we will act as an intermediary for violence. If Musashi turns violent, we will act as an intermediary

to admonish you and we will work to stop you along with the Testament Union nations. That is what it means to be neutral.”

At that moment, people’s voices could be heard from south of London. They came from the third and fourth levels on the south side of England.

They began as cries of surprise and soon grew to a great roar.

“Masazumi-sama, this is ‘Musashi’. Our spell radar has detected the approach of an unidentified fleet from the southeast. You may use this information to assist in your discussion. Over.”

Just as “Musashi” had said, an unknown fleet was approaching from the south of England.

...What is that?

As if to answer her question, someone moved to her left.

It was Charles Howard of the Trumps. He brought a hand to his chest and bowed toward the queen whose wings had vanished.

“I purchased an aerial fleet from Holland.”

He spoke casually, but Masazumi could imagine how much effort that would have taken.

“For the armada battle with Tres España?” she asked him.

“Testament. It was in exchange for a fleet I will later have constructed and for lessened tariffs. We needed a newly constructed fleet, but we did not have much money to put toward shipbuilding after preparing emergency reserves for the war and preparing our defenses. I felt a single fleet would tide us over for the moment. Once it arrives in England and I stamp my seal, ownership will fully transfer to me. At the moment, the ships are still registered with Holland.”

Marube-ya: “I’m getting the feeling he’s better at backroom deals than normal commerce.”

Silver Wolf: “Judge. I also get the feeling he’s creating an unstable bubble of prosperity and yet keeping a straight face all the while.”

Asama: “Yes, and I think he’s making deals based on nothing but trust in his own name.”

Our business-oriented girls sure are harsh, thought Masazumi.

“Well, Musashi? You are surrounded.” The Fairy Queen lightly crossed her arms and nodded. “We have already deployed a ground unit to the third level and to this palace. How many of you can reach the Musashi? Or do you think the Musashi can reach IZUMO if it leaves port now and abandons you? Look at this.”

She rotated the sign frame by her hand so Masazumi could see.

It showed what she had been viewing and what she wanted Masazumi to see.

It displayed an image of a pet cat with the following comment below: “The cat to which the queen gave the noble name of Golden Ball just had kittens!”

“Eh?”

Everyone stared at it in confusion and the queen did not notice at first.

“?”

When she finally checked the sign frame and saw it was still displaying the cat, she gave a calm comment.

“Wrong page.”

Masazumi watched as the queen searched for the correct data page.

Flat Vassal: “W-wow. My hostility just lessened a bit! I-I’m sorry!”

According to the Testament descriptions, the Fairy Queen was quite playful, but Masazumi felt that was more airheaded.

The queen soon found the data page and displayed it.

“This is a signed letter to Hexagone Française, Tres España, M.H.R.R., Holland, and K.P.A. Italia. I have sent a probing greeting revealing what I plan to request and I have already received their responses. By sending this, the request will be officially made.”

She lightly raised her hand and smiled at Masazumi.

“I hear you made quite a fool of our treasurer at your transport ship on the fourth level.”

Everyone from Musashi did not hesitate to glare at Heidi and Shirojiro. Shirojiro ignored them, but Heidi expressionlessly struck her sign frame and Erimaki.

Marube-ya: “This could be a pain, so you can each order a single item from the gift catalog of the K.P.A. Italia sweets shop we’re partners with.”

Silver Wolf: “You would dare stoop to a bribe!? But I will settle for the assorted chocolates package.”

Marube-ya: “Y-you went right for the most expensive one, didn’t you!?”

My friends don’t hold back, thought Masazumi as she saw the others choose items with similar prices.

It worried her how Asama was only looking at the section for sweets with alcohol inside.

...Now then. What should I do?

In truth, she had simulated this much in the preliminary meeting with the others.

From here on, it was likely their opponent would go in for an offensive compromise. It would eliminate what Masazumi had said, but it would still be a great compromise.

...It's coming, isn't it?

Before she responded, the Fairy Queen spoke for her.

“People of Musashi, there is a more peaceful resolution than world domination or independence. Would you like to know what that is?”

...Here it is.

With her premonition proven true, Masazumi spoke.

“Judge. For future reference, please tell us.”

At Masazumi's urging, Elizabeth smiled with raised eyebrows.

“Simply ask to have this entire meeting rendered null and void.”

“Do they have no choice but to accept? Even if that is a hellish compromise for Musashi?”

Fusae and Segundo sat in the darkness as the rising moon's light began to wash over them.

“Is it really?” she asked “Redoing this would be safer for Musashi. They can give some reason to try the meeting again from a fresh start, so it seems like a decent compromise to me.”

She stood from her seat with the moonlight washing over her, but Segundo did not turn in her direction. He crossed his arms, watched the *cadena firma*, and gently spoke.

“Having to redo a meeting is an embarrassment for a nation. On the diplomatic level, they will be seen as a nation that rejects another nation’s negotiation if the situation turns against them. In other words, they will be seen as only accepting what is convenient to them. A nation like that is dangerous and no one will perform diplomacy or trade with them. There is a threat of having that diplomacy or trade suddenly cut off and changed for their convenience. That is why no one suddenly refuses to continue a meeting or requests to redo the meeting unless diplomatic relations are being cut off altogether or the conclusion has already been reached. If Musashi does accept this compromise, the Far East will be unable to properly face the other nations and they will be seen as an inexperienced nation that only says what is convenient for them. However, that would essentially put Musashi under England’s protection. They would be unable to reach further and they would be seen as so inexperienced that they must be put under the Far East’s provisional rule system.”

So...

“This is what England is saying: we have shown you what it means to form alliances and to face all-out war from independence, so settle down and return to your rightful position.”

“Testament. In other words, Musashi has stepped out of bounds, so England and the other nations are threatening them by showing off their well-trained muscles. They are saying that the ability to wage war also includes the ability to inhibit war.”

“Testament. They are showing what it means to take this seriously and thus telling them to stop. The truly strong do not directly use that strength.”

“I see.” Fusae stretched by the window and then tilted her head. “Chancellor, how about you go back to being capable?”

“You would know all this if you would actually attend classes.”

Segundo glared at her, but Fusae looked out the window and placed a hand on it.

“Chancellor, what are we going to do?”

“Testament,” replied Segundo as he added another *cadena firma* before his eyes.

It contained the Fairy Queen’s letter and the emblem of England and Oxford.

“This same letter was sent to the other nations. I’m sure the other academies’ chancellors are also wondering what to do, but Holland has already sent a fleet directly to England.”

“Which means...”

“Testament,” he said again. He did not seem to mind that his responses were monotonous. “Holland is a small nation, but they are Protestant and a main player in the Peace of Westphalia. If England gives them credit for this, they will gain more authority during the negotiations at Westphalia. And in turn, England’s authority will also rise. In that case, we have no choice but to agree to this request. Where is Takakane?”

“Performing practice swings on the new ship. I need to bring him some beer later. ...It really is a pain. If it isn’t consecrated, our ghost bodies won’t absorb it, but when it *is* consecrated, the added exorcism ability makes your tongue tingle. Anything with decent malt content just feels wrong.”

“Please stop drinking while piloting the ship.”

“We’ll calm down with some consecrated ramen afterwards, so don’t worry.”

“You two really are enjoying your afterlife.”

As if to take a break, Segundo tore himself away from the *cadena firma*.

“Now then. What will Musashi’s vice president do? I doubt she did not see this as a possibility, but even if she did, what does she plan to do about it?”

Chapter 44: Performers on the Stage

CHAPTER 44

"Performers on the Stage"



If both sides are the protagonist

How can that become a play?

Point Allocation (Mutual Understanding)

If both sides are the protagonist

How can that become a play?

Point Allocation (Mutual Understanding)

Masazumi took a deep breath within the silent stone hall.

The excitement had come to an end. She understood that her words had set the world in motion and that left only one thing.

...I need to preserve that moving world.

It was often said that things were ‘easier said than done’ and this was the same. Creating the motion was easy, but keeping that movement going or keeping things fixed in place after it ended were difficult.

War had not broken out, but Musashi was facing the possibility of all-out war with the other nations. Their right to war thrust that possibility into the forefront.

Do this carefully yet boldly, she ordered herself.

“Fairy Queen.”

“What?”

The queen replied, but not as a confident victor. This was the kindness of England. If Masazumi rushed this and attempted to take advantage of that kindness, England would use their justice to cut down Musashi.

“Musashi does not wish for a hostile relationship with England.”

“Meaning?”

The queen used as few words as possible so as not to hint at any possible promise. Nevertheless, she was likely interested.

...That means I need to step forward here.

If Masazumi did not go for the openings in England's attack, there was a chance they would simply push back with their attacks.

...I need to warn her that they can't force our hand with their military might.

But if she suddenly said that, England could take action to "prove their strength". They could not allow themselves to be mocked while the other nations watched on.

Masazumi knew she had to be careful and she knew what she had to say first.

"England is not serious about its hostility toward Musashi."

"Hah. Don't be ridiculous. If my request to the other nations was a joke, it would bring shame to England. A sovereign nation cannot invite other nations for a mere jest."

"Judge. Your request to them was likely serious. However..."

However...

"England can allow the other nations to sink the Musashi, but you cannot allow yourselves to carry out the attack."

Innocentius took a swig of water.

"The Fairy Queen really is a woman. If the bird in her pocket escapes, she'll send the hunters after it, but as long as it's in her pocket, she wants to hear it sing."

"It bothers me how you occasionally become a poet."

"I had excellent grades in literature class."

“And I was a science teacher. I wasn’t even in charge of politics or economics,” pointed out Galileo. “At any rate, what does this mean? England intends to surround the Musashi. I understand that much. But why is Musashi’s vice president saying England alone will not attack them in an all-out war? And what is her reasoning for saying it here?”

“Women never play fair. I worked as a merchant on the lowest levels before becoming pope, so I know. They care about themselves the most. Even if they serve another, they still care the most about their servant self. That’s why we have to watch out for England even if we have no choice but to agree to their request.” He took a breath. “Look. The Fairy Queen truly is a woman who manipulates the entire world in order to look after herself.”

In preparation to reach the gap in her opponent’s military power, Masazumi further emphasized the topic.

“We both stated at the beginning that this would be an equivalent exchange. So if that exchange can be achieved, England will be our ally. Isn’t that right?”

“Testament. That is how nations and academies interact as equals. But so what? We have the Musashi completely surrounded as it has proved dangerous.” The Fairy Queen tilted her head. “So why do you say England alone will not attack the Musashi?”

“Judge. I will state up front why I would say that. To me, it seems England wishes to give another nation the credit for Musashi’s destruction.”

Segundo sighed as he peered into the *cadena firma* with Fusae.

“Musashi’s vice president gave England’s justification before they could.”

“What do you mean?”

“Testament,” he replied as he watched the Fairy Queen remain silent.

She neither affirmed nor denied that vice president’s allegation.

“England can’t say whether this is true or not. In which case, it probably is. They never intended to attack the Musashi and they planned to justify that by giving another nation the credit for sinking the Musashi. However, England has its own worries. Namely, they have to be worried the other nations will suspect they have some ulterior motive behind handing out that credit. In other words...”

In other words...

“Is England trying to preserve their strength by not attacking the Musashi?”

“You mean...?”

“It’s probably true. If they said it themselves, the other nations would have their suspicions after sinking the Musashi. They would suspect England had preserved their own nation while manipulating the other nations. But if a sympathetic nation or Musashi says it, it can be interpreted differently. England can say they wanted to take part as well, but they interpreted Musashi’s statement as a test of England’s humble heart. They would claim the need to prove the Fairy Queen’s nation was willing to give the credit to another nation. However, this means Musashi has given England another excuse to not attack the Musashi.”

His breath turned to a laugh.

“Musashi has protected England from the questions of the other nations if an all-out attack on the Musashi does indeed occur. That is a massive favor. England can preserve its power and exhaust the other nations’ power while claiming to hand over the credit as a sign of loyalty to the Testament Union. Musashi has just used us as bait in hopes that England will feel obligated to return the favor.”

“Testament. If that is true, shouldn’t the rest of the conversation prove it? Musashi needs to show why England won’t attack them now that they have claimed they have no reason to.”

And...

“But once they show that, what does Musashi hope to gain from England? If England is not attacking them, what do they gain?”

“That depends on what their vice president is thinking. However, I have some doubts about this.”

Segundo tilted his head and Fusae peered at him with a questioning look.

“The conversation seems to be continuing at Musashi’s vice president’s pace, but this world is much crueler than that. As you probably already know, Fusae, this world is not that kind.”

So...

“I predict this meeting will undergo several more considerable changes, so let’s keep watching while showing the proper concern. Fusae, can you bring over the beer bottle and the dried foods in that paper bag?”

Masazumi awkwardly sensed she was correct based on the Fairy Queen’s silence.

...Calm down.

When attacking her opponent, she had to remember to follow through. England was not a large nation, but it was a powerful one. Crushing a powerful nation’s pride could only be dangerous. They were not merely facing a dispatched military force like at the Battle of Mikawa, so she had to calm down and maintain her normal presence of mind.

Gold Mar: “It’s just a storyboard, but do you want to see it? Should Ga-chan send it through?”

...Does nothing change the way you people act!?

Masazumi's blood pressure briefly shot up, but she also felt glad the Far East had such a sense of freedom.

She reminded herself to at least maintain an appearance of calm before she spoke.

“Fairy Queen, in addition to giving another nation the credit for sinking the Musashi, I think you have another reason why you will not...no, why you *cannot* attack the Musashi.”

Her words were met by silence, but that was likely in order to not give any hints to the other nations. A careless reply could lead to interference based on unjust suspicion.

And so Masazumi gave a probing continuation in an attempt to read her opponent's intentions.

“First, England's newly constructed fleet still belongs to Holland who you can pass the credit to. Also, your older fleet is scouting out Tres España and will not return in time.”

“What about the ground forces? They are already deployed around the Musashi and here.”

That was fast, thought Masazumi.

But the Fairy Queen seemed to have a reason for trying to rush her answer.

...Does this mean England is hopeful of our answer?

She took a breath.

...Don't rush this.

She was more nervous than she knew and the conscious focus on her breathing when speaking was proof of that.

But, she thought. *Some people panic when they realize that and others don't.*

Which was she?

...Most likely...

She was telling herself to restrain her excitement, so she would be the latter.

...I'm the type of person who is excited to stand in such a tense place.

And so she worked to keep the corners of her mouth from rising while using her words much like moving pieces on a chess board.

“The ground forces?”

The Fairy Queen listened.

...How much does Musashi's vice president understand us?

When interacting with another nation, it was important to understand as much as possible about that nation's situation.

In diplomacy, trade, and even the comings and goings of people, nothing one-sided would be accepted.

Even if sovereignty and the law allowed for it, interactions between nations could be similar to interactions between people. The Reformation had created some religious troubles in Europe, but some interactions overcame those troubles.

If both parties qualified as equal and both needed the interaction, it could take place.

For that reason, the Fairy Queen wished to know how much Musashi understood England and she asked a question to find out.

“Yes, England's ground forces. They will attack you and the Musashi before it leaves port. How are we to give another nation credit for that?”

England's ground forces were indeed deployed to the palace and around the Musashi.

However, Musashi's vice president shook her head.

"Is that really enough personnel to secure the Musashi and attack before it leaves port? Let me make one thing clear." She indicated her comrades with her right hand. "I made sure everyone accompanying me is capable of returning alive no matter what happens. What about you?"

"The Trumps are always perfect."

"Judge."

The vice president nodded and then pointed behind her to the hall's entrance.

"Then let me ask this: are the defenses there also perfect?"

"This is a strategy for in case they actually have to run for it," muttered Sakai atop the academy bridge as the Musashi finished its preparations. "By indicating their route ahead of time, it actually makes the enemy less certain where they'll escape. It makes sure the enemy has to defend everything. Also, can Masazumi-kun and the others see what we're seeing?"

He was referring to the countless lights surrounding the Musashi in England's land port.

The lights came from the torches of England's warriors who were prepared to board the Musashi.

"Sakai-sama, what is the meaning of this? Each one is holding two torches. Over."

Sakai turned toward "Musashi" who was polishing the railing.

“That makes them look more numerous. They’re probably well aware we’ve caught on, but they still need to show that attack-oriented attitude. However, the situation has reached a point where an attitude isn’t enough. Masazumi-kun most likely knows the level of their defenses, so she may have realized that England’s defenses are not focused on London.”

Hearing that, “Musashi” stopped polishing and tilted her head.

“How do you know that? Over.”

“It’s simple,” replied Sakai. “The coming armada battle has a certain unique characteristic. While trying to land on England, Tres España’s Grande y Felicísima Armada travels around England along with the English fleet. It begins with a confused battle, but Tres España is forced to retreat after receiving an attack from fire ships. However, it is thought Tres España will use that to their advantage. They will likely lessen their damages by fighting a high-speed battle while withdrawing. They can also continue their landing operation to panic England and show off their ability to invade to the other nations.

“Anyway, that’s why England’s ground units should be stationed around the coast. They will also be preparing their defenses, maintaining camp sites, training to familiarize themselves with the terrain, and working to store the food gained during the festival. They must have been doing this for months now. Otherwise, they would not have sufficient research into defensive tactics using the terrain or reached an understanding with the local people. All of this will leave the fewest men for London which has the Trumps and Ex. Caliburn. ...In other words, here.”

“Yes, this city has the weakest defenses. Isn’t that right?” Masazumi pointed straight down. “The personnel here can’t attack Musashi. The best you could manage was the previous attack that was meant as an excuse to the Testament Union. The same goes for the Oxford personnel.”

She turned to Futayo and Futayo responded with a glance to the queen and the Trumps.

“Based on the footsteps, there are around 500 in all. If they divide them equally between each exit, I can likely secure a path for us. That will mean leaving the Trumps to everyone else, but-...”

“Thanks, Futayo. That’s plenty.”

Reaching the level of certainty would hurt England’s pride, so it was better for both sides if they left it up in the air whether it could actually be done or not.

...That brings this topic to an end.

Masazumi went in for the final point.

“Fairy Queen, I would like to ask one thing. You said you would take command and use Ex. Caliburn to sink the Musashi.”

The strength of the queen’s gaze did not change, but Masazumi continued regardless.

The final point was the reason why the Fairy Queen could not use Excalibur.

...For this one, we need to create a reason!

Normally, the queen would have no reason not to use it, but Masazumi would create a reason why she definitely could not.

Masazumi could only give this reason because she had seen the state of Excalibur today.

“If you use Ex. Caliburn now, wouldn’t it hinder the execution of Mary?”

...This is such a cruel thing to use as a bargaining chip.

Masazumi thought that as a fact rather than out of kindness.

Due to the history recreation, Mary's execution was needed to begin the armada battle. Also, that execution was being carried out with the Andamio de la Ejecución.

...Ex. Caliburn's power will be passed through the ley lines to return Mary to those ley lines.

She did not know how much progress had been made on the modifications to that end, but neither did the other nations.

That allowed her to use it as a bargaining chip.

"Mary's execution using Ex. Caliburn is necessary for England's history recreation, but its modifications do not appear complete and some from Musashi caused a bit of trouble there today. If you forcibly used Ex. Caliburn and a malfunction occurs, it would violate the history recreation, wouldn't it?" asked Masazumi. "You would be forcing its use to do your duty as a Testament Union nation, but wouldn't not using it and preserving the history recreation be the better option if you are to look to the future?"

"Are you criticizing me?"

"No." Masazumi placed a hand on her chest and lowered her head toward the Fairy Queen. "It is all for the history recreation of the armada battle that will occur in one week. That is why England cannot attack Musashi. It is the obvious conclusion based on England's sense of justice." She took a breath. "All I have done is impertinently point out something so obvious anyone would notice it, Your Majesty."

Everyone from Musashi heard the queen's silence, but the divine chat was not silent.

Flat Vassal: "U-um... What does this mean?"

Silver Wolf: “Judge. By saying this is obvious for England and insisting it is all for the history recreation, she is making it easier for England to agree. There are a number of justifications, but the Testament Union’s history recreation is at the base of them all. By bringing it all back to here, England is protected.”

Gold Mar: “Ohhh, Mito-tsan! You sound almost serious!”

Asama: “Almost? Well, I suppose putting that way is safer.”

Silver Wolf: “Wait. I always try to be serious. ...Does it not seem like it?”

Marube-ya: “Oh, the queen just said something.”

Silver Wolf: “Y-you’re ignoring me! You’re all ignoring me!”

Elizabeth took a breath and faced Musashi’s vice president who stood ahead but below.

She had only one thought on her mind: *This girl will become truly troublesome one day.*

The vice president had little experience and her words lacked polish. Her knowledge seemed patched together or like something a child was using after just learning it. Also, it may have been an act, but she had a way of speaking as if she understood everything. It mostly came down to being irritating, but one point in particular was the most troublesome.

...She’s enjoying this.

That girl undoubtedly thought of herself as the protagonist of this place.

She was troublesome.

After all, once that sort of person gained actual skill, her downsides would change to favorable idiosyncrasies.

As she gained strength, the irritating aspects would become something reliable.

That was how a protagonist worked.

...I was the same!

With a mental nod, Elizabeth recalled how much of an idiot she had been in the past.

As she thought about the past, she recalled a certain scene and an individual within it. It was her sister back when they were younger and had often played together.

...We made a promise.

At that point, she shook her head. She saw her vice chancellor and vice president give questioning looks from either side, but she waved a hand to say she was fine.

However, a few words escaped her lips. They were the words she had once exchanged.

“Save you from anything.”

The words may have reached Musashi’s vice president because she frowned.

However, this was nothing for her to worry about.

...This is a reminder to myself.

The Fairy Queen then corrected her posture and faced her opponent.

The girl before her irritated her horribly, but whether she grew further in the future or not, the trouble would fall on the other nations. Her foolishness would likely be at least somewhat healed by the time the Musashi completed its circle of the Far East.

At any rate, the girl seemed to understand England’s situation.

England could not attack Musashi. The biggest reason was England's need to preserve its strength for the armada battle and beyond.

They knew Tres España intended to use their retreat to give themselves an advantage in the battle. The attack on Musashi with a stealth ship had been more than enough of a warning to the English fleet that would pursue them. To damage a fleet of that power and yet not suffer what amounted to a defeat, England had to preserve its strength.

...From that perspective...

Musashi's vice president had been right when she said Excalibur could have a dangerous malfunction at the moment, but there was another reason not to use it.

...Musashi's ability to trade is indeed appealing.

If possible, the queen wanted to keep the Musashi around.

...That is Phylargia.

While thinking about the Logismo Oplo given to England, Elizabeth asked a question.

"Let me ask something before making my decision. You said this was an equivalent exchange, didn't you? Then what can Musashi offer us that is equivalent? You will continue on and spread chaos through the other nations with your inexperienced ideals. If you wish for us to accept that and ally with you, what will you give us in exchange? What can you give us to make up for the damage of political and trade interference that the other nations are sure to begin if we ally with you?"

She asked her question.

"Answer me. What will Musashi offer England?"

"Judge," replied Musashi's vice president. "England will become Musashi's primary trade port."

“That’s just playing dirty!”

“You sound delighted to me.”

Innocentius ignored the glare Galileo was giving him and opened a *cornice firma*. It displayed a map of the Far East and he drew a red circle around England where it floated north of Hexagone Française.

“Listen. By making England their primary trade port, Musashi will end their practice of travelling around the Far East once a year and instead create a system of leaving England to trade and returning to England afterwards! That means England can use the giant trade system that is the Musashi to amass wealth whenever the Musashi moves! And because the Musashi travels through every nation, every nation’s wealth will gather in England! Doesn’t that seem unfair to you? Hm, hm, hm?”

“I seem to recall that K.P.A. Italia used to do the same with trade on the Mediterranean and in the Middle East.”

“As did Ancient Rome. Also...”

Innocentius drew a few red lines with England in the center.

“These are the trade routes to the Logismoï Oplo nations. Look, if you exclude England, that’s Tres España, Hexagone Française, M.H.R.R., K.P.A. Italia, and Sviet Rus. They can travel to all of them from England without much difference in distance. And with England as their primary port, Musashi can choose to travel a certain route any number of times in a year rather than the single time of their current schedule. By making England their primary port in exchange for allying with them, they are telling other nations they can achieve an equal status in trade if they also join the alliance. To prevent all the wealth from gathering in England and to take their own cut, the other nations – especially those along the main routes – will want to join. By doing that, the allied nations can communicate and negotiate together in addition to trade.”

Innocentius thought for a moment before continuing.

“Fairy Queen, accept this alliance. Then we can use that as an excuse to do the same.”

“Can you really say that after going to such lengths to make an enemy of Musashi, former boy?”

“They would still be an enemy even if we formed an alliance. Also, the more nations join the alliance, the more complicated the Musashi’s course will grow and the less wealth will go to each allied nation. In the end, it will be no different from now. And once every nation has advanced their aerial ship technology far enough to trade with neighboring nations without relying on the Musashi, we can follow the academy rules for trade and more easily trade amongst ourselves. Once that happens, everyone will break their trade alliance with Musashi and become their enemies once more. But I’m sure Musashi will still make the proposal despite understanding all that. In which case...”

He erased all the red lines on the *cornice firma*.

“When we become their enemy, it will happen all at once. There’s no reason to hesitate to build up our strength for that moment.”

“Your justice can be hard to follow because it has a way of switching between what lies on surface and what is hidden. Aren’t you afraid of misunderstandings?”

“Justice is always found in history. Catholicism can be said to be history itself and I am its representative, so I can only be justice. Whether on the surface or hidden below, justice is justice.”

Innocentius opened a divine mail *cornice firma*.

“Let’s contact the industrial committee and have them consider whether K.P.A. Italia can use that trade system in regards to the other nations. If any nations not allied with us form an alliance, we can destroy that connection by bringing this system to even one of those nations. Also...”

He displayed the situation in England and spoke to the images of Musashi's vice president and the Fairy Queen.

“Don't think you can move the world with only two nations. Freeing this world is surprisingly difficult.”

...I see.

Elizabeth gave a mental nod.

She knew very well what the Musashi vice president's suggestion meant.

The suggested trade system would be effective in the early stages with few allied nations, but the effects would ultimately fade away and disappear.

And since the Musashi traveled around the Far East once a year, they would be forced to break that rule if they were to use England as its primary trade port.

By shrinking the time between trades, the rate of earnings would drop.

...But changing Musashi's annual visit to several times or even a dozen times a year would mean a lot.

If England could secure the production and emergency reserves they needed, the trade could be used to increase their domestic industries and they could use intermediate trade if they simply needed money.

The ideal system would be to gain money through intermediate trade, use that money to maintain their domestic facilities, and export goods made with those strengthened domestic industries.

If a victory in the armada battle and their influence at the Peace of Westphalia was added to all that, they could rise above the other nations in a very short amount of time.

Before the benefit of the trade grew meaningless with the addition of the other nations, they could also use the obtained funds to strengthen themselves and begin a large-scale settlement of the New World.

I see, thought Elizabeth once more.

She then spoke to Musashi's vice president.

“Your ultimate objective is not long-term success. You intend to give a powerful nation the benefits of short-term success to incite us to settle the outer world.”

“Judge. I knew the Fairy Queen would catch on.”

The girl bowed her head and spoke from that position.

“The Logismoi Oplo nations are powerful, but their economic situations and wars have left them unprepared and unequipped to settle the outer world. As such, I hope to have Musashi travel to England and then the other Logismoi Oplo nations in order to assist them using our trade. If the most powerful nations are equally prepared to begin settling the outer world by the time of the Peace of Westphalia, the world can return to its original form. To put it another way...”

Musashi's vice president raised her head and looked directly at the queen from below her black hair.

“The provisional rule of the Far East exists because of the inability to settle the outer world. That is something that did not exist in history and Musashi wishes to bring back the world as it was in history. I want to help bring the world back to its original form so the history recreation can be carried out properly. We will return the world to its rightful form in order to stop the Apocalypse and continue past it.”

She once more made the action the queen had earlier rejected.

She reached out her right hand.

“Fairy Queen, will you move forward as the nation that will take the first step toward the proper world?”

Almost all the people of England heard those words via divine transmission.

“England. You were once the land of the Gaels. They were invaded by the Celts and the two reconciled, but then the Normans of Hexagone Française invaded. That Norman Conquest created England.”

“So?” asked someone listening. “What’s your point?”

The voice continued as if to answer that question.

“Even the Normans who arrived as conquerors eventually became English due to war against Hexagone Française and civil war.”

She could be heard taking a breath.

“You could travel to new lands, you did not fear traversing the ocean or the sky, and you possessed a love of independence. Has that vanished from England? Can those things not be found in a small, inexperienced nation? You are the nation of the ley lines which can defeat history or anything else and you are the nation of the Fairy Queen born of those ley lines,” she said. “If times have changed and that nation cannot take a great first step in history, is that not a sign that the Apocalypse is truly upon us?”

Silence fell. Quiet and stillness had filled that hall several times already, but it contained something different this time.

“ ... ”

The one holding out her hand did not pull it back.

She waited.

That action moved nothing, allowed nothing to move, and acted as the starting point for the next action.

Eventually, the one waiting received an answer to her thoughts and action.

However, it did not come from the words or actions of the Fairy Queen.

A noise came from the left-hand corridor on England's side.

Sounds of moving metal equipment and quiet voices of suspicion were overpowered by approaching footsteps.

“Hey, could you wait just a minute there?”

Two people casually entered the hall. The man and girl both wore vermillion uniforms.

“Hi there. I'm Secretary Velázquez of Tres España and this is 3rd Special Duty Officer Tachibana Gin. As Tres Españan diplomats, we have a special objection concerning this meeting.”

The tall, slender, and mustachioed long-lived man faced Musashi's vice president and lightly raised his right hand.

“Nothing personal, okay?”

Study

●Armada Battle●



"Sis! Sis! Tell me about this armada battle that everyone's been talking about! I want to know all about it so I too can be popul-armada! Sorry, that wasn't a very good joke."



"Heh heh heh. Foolish brother, it's important to recognize your mistakes when working on new material. Anyway, the armada battle is the naval battle that occurred when Tres España's Grande y Felicísima Armada arrived to land at and conquer England and England repelled them. However, Tres España had a lot of transport ships and their ships were inferior to England's since England had constant contact with the ocean. The Grande y Felicísima Armada made it to the ocean near England, but they were unable to land and they retreated while circling England. This is what it looks like on the map. Keep in mind that the whole thing took an entire week."

①: Hostilities Begin off of Plymouth at Southwestern England
The English fleet attacks from behind. Tres España's vice-flagship is destroyed and their treasury ship is evacuated due to an accidental fire.

②: Second Round off of Portland at Southern England
Tres España's fleet forms a defensive formation while England's fleet pursues and destroys ships one by one.

③: Resupply Time
Tres España attempts to resupply at their mainland, but England interferes.

④: Third Round off of Southeastern England
Off of Calais on the Far Eastern mainland, England's fleet crashes eight fire ships into Tres España's fleet to throw them into confusion.

⑤: Fourth Round off of Gravelines near Calais
From here, Tres España begins retreating north and around England. England's fleet begins pursuit.

⑥: Pursuit Ends off of Southwestern England



"Once their treasury ship was sunk in the early stages, I doubt they could have survived for long even if they landed, but it's still plenty thrilling because they get really, really close to England. That tour around England will still happen in the history recreation, so all of England is on high alert. Also, the Grande y Felicísima Armada is known as the 'invincible fleet' because England began ironically calling it that after the battle."



"Isn't the English fleet just harassing them for most of this?"



"Why do you always have to go right out and say what everyone's thinking?"

Armada Battle

Toori: Sis! Sis! Tell me about this armada battle that everyone's been talking about! I want to know all about it so I too can be popul-armada! Sorry, that wasn't a very good joke.

Kimi: Heh heh heh. Foolish brother, it's important to recognize your mistakes when working on new material. Anyway, the armada battle is the naval battle that occurred when Tres España's Grande y Felicísima Armada arrived to land at and conquer England and England repelled them. However, Tres España had a lot of transport ships and their ships were inferior to England's since England had constant contact with the ocean. The Grande y Felicísima Armada made it to the ocean near England, but they were unable to land and they retreated while circling England. This is what it looks like on the map. Keep in mind that the whole thing took an entire week.

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From here, Tres España begins retreating north and around England. England's fleet begins pursuit.

6: Pursuit Ends off of Southwestern England

Map:

Top: Scotland

Upper left: Ireland

Lower left: Wales

Upper right: Oxford Academy

Middle right: London (Anglia)

Lower right: England

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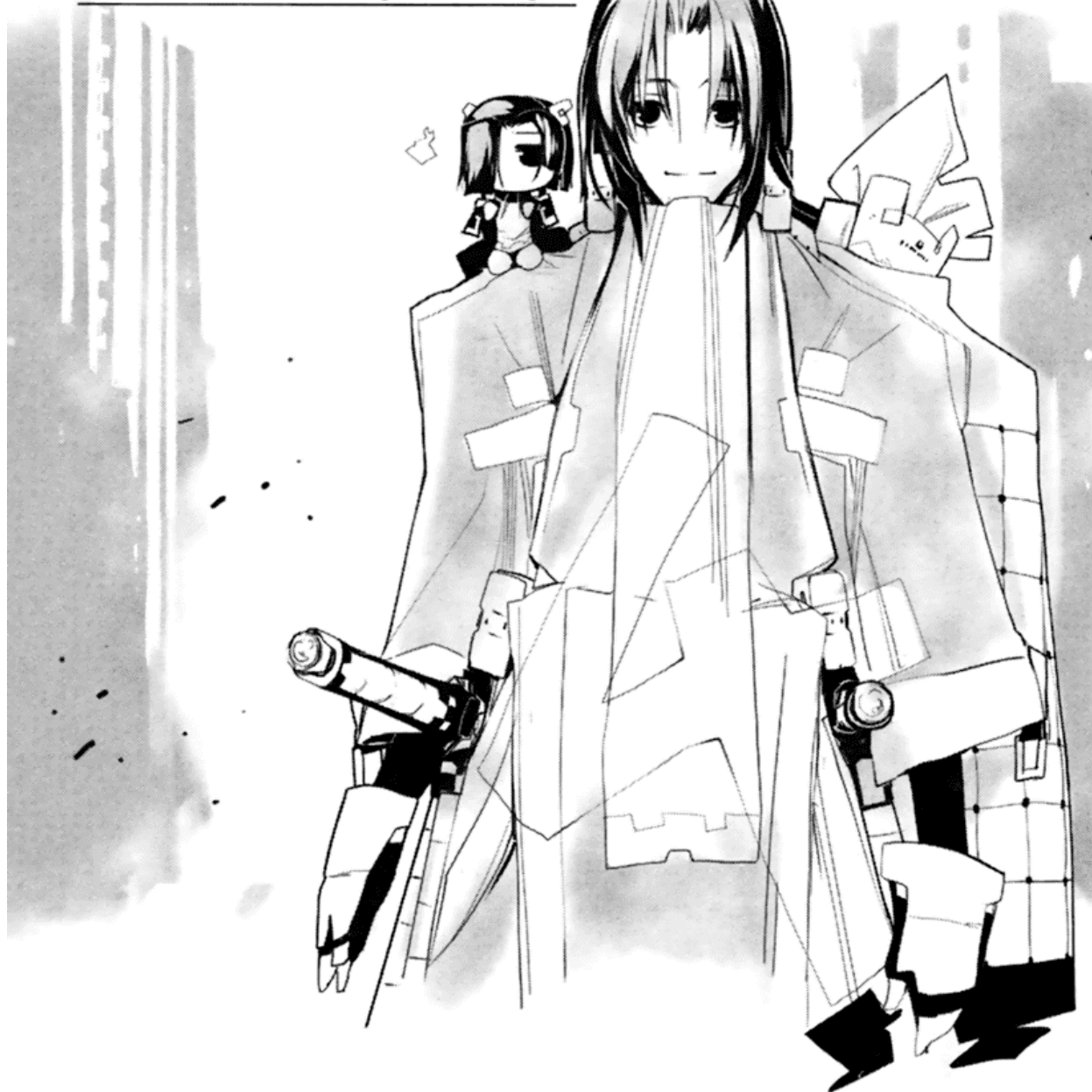
Toori: Isn't the English fleet just harassing them for most of this?

Kimi: Why do you always have to go right out and say what everyone's thinking?

Chapter 45: Performers from the Wings of the Stage

CHAPTER 45

"Performers from the Wings of the Stage"



Can an intruder be necessary?

And if so

Why is that the case?

Point Allocation (The Entire World)

Can an intruder be necessary?

And if so

Why is that the case?

Point Allocation (The Entire World)

Two people in vermillion uniforms appeared in the meeting hall.

One was Tres Españan Secretary Diego Velázquez and the other was 3rd Special Duty Officer Tachibana Gin. The former looked across the gathered people and spoke.

“Now then. You suggested a trade alliance with Musashi, did you? To be honest, it’s a pretty interesting idea. And using it to prepare for future settlements isn’t wrong as far as the history recreation and advancing into the outer world is concerned.” He brought a hand to his chin. “But it’s all too idealistic.”

After all...

“Setting up primary trading ports for the Musashi will increase the number of times it trades. That will set up a circulation of wealth, but the participating nations will have to increase their domestic production to increase their supply.”

“And what is wrong with that?”

The Musashi vice president’s voice was completely emotionless.

That told Velázquez she knew quite well that and he lowered his hat over his eyes before continuing.

“Doing that will change the balance of power among the leaders of domestic industries and trade. After all, it will become easier for new businesses to enter the market. That competition and chaos will cut into the profit margins of those who have long controlled domestic industry and trade and they will all decline.”

He laughed toward the floor. “The treasurers of England, the Far East, Hexagone Française, and K.P.A. Italia help manage commerce and hold real power there, so you can work to regulate that. However, we and M.H.R.R. manage commerce and industry on the committee and civilian level or we are divided between principalities, so it will not be so easy.

“Those afraid of decline will oppose the alliance to preserve their vested rights, they will prevent the student council and chancellor’s officers from providing money before that alliance is formed, and they have invested in the mass media and are therefore able to lower approval ratings of those in power by broadcasting criticism of them. If following the student council and chancellor’s officers will mean no more money, facilities, and materials, then politics will stall. The normal students will hold a special general student meeting to dismiss both the chancellor’s officers and the student council. And with the backing of those with vested rights, an extremely conservative academy that opposes the alliance will be formed.”

Velázquez’s words did nothing to change the look on the Musashi vice president’s face.

However, she still spoke.

“Tres España received the same treatment from those with vested rights in domestic industries when your economy switched from domestic industry to trade with the New World, but did it work back then?”

“It left our domestic industries in shambles. Even when we obtain money from outside, we can’t produce anything at home, so we end up buying things from outside. We truly are in dire straits. ... We’re just barely holding on and now you’re proposing a new system of trade? Those in the trade industry are not going to allow that. If merchants trading with Musashi cut into our trade with the New World, the competing products will drop in value and decline. Y’see, if we increase our domestic production, it will put the merchants importing those products out of business. That’s why Tres España can’t agree to this alliance.”

“Judge.” Musashi’s vice president nodded. “And here I thought I could Tres-t you of all nations to agree.”

Masazumi’s joke bombed on a worldwide scale.

Masazumi was a little surprised when the hall filled with whispering voices.

“Wh-what!? I just felt like saying it, that's all!”

Me: “Yeah, but that one was bad. And I mean really bad.”

Asama: “Sorry. I had a voice erasing spell prepared, but I didn’t make it in time.”

Asama: “Vice President: D-dammit. Just you watch! Next time, I’ll get people to laugh!”

Silver Wolf: “I think you’re straying from the main point here.”

However, everyone saw the Fairy Queen turn her back on top of the stage.

She placed her hands on the chair back and her shoulders were shaking.

Almost Everyone: “She’s laughing!”

Asama: “Vice President: See! Look at that! It was a good joke! I told you!”

Gold Mar: “Is it just me or did Seijun just get really petty?”

After the wave of muttering and tension passed, Velázquez sighed.

...What a pain.

Being a diplomat was nothing but trouble because it was a thankless job with plenty of troublesome duties. Gin remained perfectly silent next to him, but that

was because she had dumped the entire job on him and increased the trouble for him.

...But she's reliable if it comes to a fight.

It was a complete mystery how Muneshige had managed to marry her. In the past, she had been the type to grow angry if you touched her. In fact, it had seemed like she would attack if you so much as approached her. As for now...

“Are puns like that a form of humor shared worldwide?” she asked. “I will remember that.”

He felt it would be better if she did not remember it, but it also reminded him of how much people could change.

...But those changes can be a pain to deal with too.

It may have been because he was long-lived, but he felt an instinctual aversion to sudden changes like the one Musashi's vice president was asking for. And since Tres España had a large long lived population, there was something he had to say now.

“It may not look it, but Tres España has been following the history recreation quite closely.”

That's exactly right, he thought to himself. The commander, Juana, and everyone else have been doing the hard work of looking to the future while recreating the management of a debt-filled nation.

...Not that I understand half of it since I'm only the secretary.

Still, he knew it was not easy.

Just as Musashi's vice president had said, Tres España had rapidly shifted from domestic industries to New World trade. The rise in the trade industry had partially been a method of restraining those with vested rights in those domestic industries because they began trying to influence the nation's politics. And by

giving that rapidly expanding trade industry freedom and protection, the royalty had received the benefit of its independence and tax income.

Under Musashi's new trade system, the New World trade would lose its freedom and protection, so the royalty would lose that independence and tax income.

That would mean the end of it all.

...If you want a beneficial relationship, just say so.

For the sake of the history recreation, the merchants crossed the skies, settled the New World, and greeted Velázquez when they met in the city or academy. They had their negative sides, but they all did their very best.

They had no money and their decline was guaranteed, but even in the slums, the merchants and other citizens had something in common.

...They're always smiling and enjoying themselves.

Tres España was a good nation. Velázquez and the others were making sure of it. After making it past the Lepanto and the Battle of Itsukushima, they had protected that way of living. It may have been conservative, but that was fine.

However...

"That's the world I show in my paintings," said Velázquez. "So I have a question for you, Musashi. Why aren't you going to war with England?"

"What?" said everyone from Musashi.

Flat Vassal: "He's asking why we aren't? Do we have a reason *to* do it?"

Asama: "Everyone, let's be completely honest. If you know a reason, you need to confess."

Almost Everyone: "You're assuming someone has a reason!?"

However, Masazumi was the one who stood at the front of them all.

...A reason why we have to go to war with England?

She decided to look further into that question. Did they have a reason for that? And it would have to be something Tres España would want to point out.

What could it be? she thought. *Wait. It can't be...*

She did indeed come up with a reason and she was likely not the only one. All of those involved in the Battle of Mikawa would be able to come up with it.

“ ... ”

Masazumi turned around and faced someone.

“Do you need something?” asked Horizon.

“Testament. That’s right.” Velázquez’s voice rang clearly. “One of your reasons for rescuing Princess Horizon at Mikawa was the misuse of the history recreation in her murder. You used that as a justification for rescuing that princess and going to war with us.”

In that case...

“England is trying to execute Bloody Mary for the armada battle. Can England really make that interpretation here? What do you say, Musashi of the Far East? You gave your justification for war in order to save that princess, but why aren’t you using that same justification here? Are we the only ones that get attacked? Even if you’ve sealed the right to declare war, England possesses a Logismo Oplo and you can interpret that as engaging you in war. Or will you refuse to attack England and rescue Mary? Is Musashi really so inexperienced a nation that it will abandon its justification when faced with another individual being executed?”

...So this is how they’re doing it!

She had known Tres España messengers had arrived and a notification from Musashi's treasurers had led her to fear those messengers would oppose the trade alliance between their two enemy nations of England and Musashi.

Her plan for that possibility had been to ultimately gain England's approval by negotiating over the advantages of forming the alliance.

However, this complaint was unexpected.

After all, this was urging Musashi to oppose England as an enemy.

...And there's no reason for it!

They had rescued Horizon because she was directly linked to the Far East's sovereignty. It was only with several different justifications that they had made up their minds.

Their decision had not been wholly based on the misuse of the history recreation.

Meanwhile, Bloody Mary was England's royalty and getting involved would count as intervening in England's internal issues. Also, rescuing her would not benefit the Far East in any way.

Mary was not linked to the Far East's sovereignty like Horizon had been and they would not gain a Logismo Oplo by rescuing her.

There was only the one reason to get involved.

...Because this can be interpreted as misusing the history recreation?

That was ridiculous.

Tres España was merely making a huge problem by announcing a tiny issue.

...But if that qualifies as an "interpretation", this could be trouble.

"In that case," said Masazumi while getting down to the heart of the issue. "Aren't you misusing the idea of interpretations!?"

“I can say the same to you as you try to dodge the issue, Musashi Vice President. You misused the idea of interpretations and attacked K.P.A. Italia and us, but now that England is trying to be your ally, you’re using an interpretation to accept the murder of Mary. Who can trust a nation that does that?”

...This man.

He knew what people would accept and what they would not. He knew he could win by only saying what would be accepted and not responding to anything that would not.

Just as Masazumi began to wonder what to do, she heard a voice from the stage.

“Tres España, you are being very rude.”

The Fairy Queen gave support in the form of criticism.

Elizabeth looked at Velázquez with slightly raised eyebrows.

...How very troublesome.

She had no intention of allying with Musashi, but she would not let a misunderstanding about England spread to the other nations. She would say what she had to say.

“Listen,” she began. “Double Bloody Mary’s execution will not disintegrate her like you tried to do with that princess. England will not execute someone such that nothing remains.”

Drug Poet: “Lady, you are so merciful! And that composed expression is so wonderful!”

Queen: “Heh heh heh. Stir up the excitement even more, my excellent friends.”

Seal Boy: “Excellent! Excitingly excellent!! Excitingly excellent execution!”

Four Eyes: “Are we recording the logs of this divine chat?”

...Perhaps I should delete some of it. Anyway, I must speak to Tres España.

“Listen, Tres España. Your execution was a bad execution while ours is a good execution.”

“That’s quite a claim there. What exactly do you mean?”

“Testament. It is simple. We will not waste the death of English royalty like Mary.”

So...

“She is a sacrifice to protect England, so we will mourn her execution which is required for the history recreation and then we will use that death to-...”

The Fairy Queen paused and thought for a moment.

After even more thought, she finally spoke.

“My mistake. We cannot simply use her death. That could be called misusing the history recreation. Ha ha ha.”

She nodded.

“Yes, it’s something else.”

Musashi’s vice president stared at Elizabeth with her mouth hanging open.

Silver Wolf: “M-Masazumi was just shot in the back!!”

Me: “It’s really convenient how you all bother typing up your surprise on here.”

Asama: “Th-this is no time for that! ...Oh, but it really is convenient. No, wait! Masazumi! Masazumi! That was shallow as far as mental wounds go, so stay with us!!”

...What am I supposed to do?

Masazumi mentally held her head in her hands.

She seemed to have maintained an appearance of calm, so she could still manage. Probably.

However, a thought came to her.

...The Papa-Schola was easier to deal with than this!

She had never been shot from behind with him and she felt like he had operated under simple rules: hit him once and he would hit back once.

The accumulated arguments of Catholicism had been gentle for a beginner politician.

Still wondering what to do, she began going over various arguments in her head.

But as she did, something else happened.

“This sounds like an interesting discussion.”

An unfamiliar voice came from the southern main entrance behind her.

...Who is that?

A figure in red and wrapped in wind had entered the meeting hall.

“Excuse me. I am currently working with Hashiba of M.H.R.R.”

The man wore the red uniform of A.H.R.R.S., the academy of M.H.R.R., and the bottom of his legs could not be seen. A super deformed and similarly footless girl sat on his shoulder.

“I am Five Great Peaks #4 and the student council treasurer of P.A. Oda’s P.A.O.M. I have the double inherited names of Maeda Toshiie and Mercenary

King Wallenstein. I have come for an urgent recruitment discussion with the Fairy Queen.”

Sakai stopped even the slight movements of smoking his kiseru.

After a moment, he slowly released smoke from the corner of his mouth.

“To think Maeda Toshiie of P.A. Oda’s Six Heavenly Demon Army would show up. I really am behind the times.”

“Judge, judge.”

“Musashi” nodded twice and struck his shoulder a few times.

“Come to think of it, the Landsknechte were recruiting during the festival. I had assumed it was a plan to increase England’s forces by turning their non-students into temporary students, but it appears to have been more than that.” She spoke quietly as she peered into Sakai’s sign frame. “The Testament descriptions say M.H.R.R.’s Mercenary King Wallenstein held the greatest military force in history. Despite merely being the leader of a mercenary group, he had a massive enough military force to support the Thirty Years’ War. Unfortunately for him, M.H.R.R. viewed his expansion of power and increase in war costs as dangerous, so they assassinated him. However...”

“I’d like to hear what you have to say, ‘Musashi’-san.”

“Judge. M.H.R.R. did not want to lose that military force, so they put together a plan to keep him around as a ghost after his assassination. To prevent interference from the Testament Union, they chose someone from P.A. Oda to inherit his name and that was Maeda Toshiie. Over.”

“What’s going to happen?” asked Sakai as he blew smoke from his mouth. “This is trouble. M.H.R.R. is here for some fun.”

“Is that how you view this? Over.”

“Judge.” Sakai faced forward. “Just look. What could this be but a bit of fun?”

The land port and the third and fourth levels had previously been filled with nothing but the few hundred English warriors holding two torches each to disguise their small numbers.

But that had changed.

Now, a much larger force filled the night with the blue flames of their torches.

“That’s gotta be more than twenty thousand.”

The Trumps and the Musashi VIPs took defensive stances at the entrance of an Oda clan leader, but the Fairy Queen showed no concern. Maeda responded in kind.

“Long time no see, Your Majesty. My Landsknechte have done as you asked and used this festival to help expand England’s student force.”

The man who gave a small bow with a tiny girl on his shoulder was slender and of average height. Due to his build, the M.H.R.R. student uniform and its internal armor looked like a fairly large cloak on him. However, he did not stop standing tall and proud when facing the queen.

And...

“Drain!”

Light shot toward him.

Walsingham fired a glass from almost directly to his side. She used her gravitational control to shoot the glass which was filled with cider.

She targeted the base of his neck. Whether he caught it or broke it, the contents would get on his clothes. His options were to dodge it or...

“You’re telling me to bow?” muttered Toshiie.

In that moment, he dropped a small object from his hand.

It was a coin. It fell and, just before it struck the floor, a certain color burst from below his feet.

That color was white and it took the form of an arm.

A pure white and translucent arm snapped up from the shadow falling next to his shoes.

The arm was about three meters long, but it was not made up of a single arm. The hands and upper arms of men, women, children, and the aged were tangled together and twisted about. They wrapped around and grabbed at each other as if they desired each other and they devoured the coin.

“_____!”

Rather than grabbing, striking, or swiping away the glass, the swinging palm swallowed up the glass.

The arm disappeared, wind blew about, and finally...

“Garrrrp.”

The girl on his shoulder opened her mouth as if expelling air from her stomach.

Toshiie turned a flustered look in her direction.

“Ah wah wah wah wah. That’s rude, Ma-chan.”

“Nn.”

The girl named “Ma-chan” nodded and Toshiie faced forward. While making sure not to look away from the queen, he crouched down to pick up the empty glass that had appeared on the floor at some point.

He used that motion to lower his head and bow.

“I believe you said I was free to come to this school building.”

Once he raised his head, the Fairy Queen asked a question.

“We are holding a meeting. What happened to the guards out front? Don’t tell me...”

Toshiie held his right arm forward to move it out from below his red cloak. The upper arm contained an armband with P.A.O.M.’s emblem and embroidery saying, “Treasurer – Maeda Toshiie / Treasurer’s Aide – Matsu”.

“If I show off this and say I have a free pass in, I can get into most places.”

He then tilted his head and looked around. The Musashi members, their vice president, and the Trumps were all about equally distant.

“I’m going to join in this discussion a bit. I do hold the treasurer position in M.H.R.R. after all. I’ll say this up front: M.H.R.R. also cannot agree with Musashi’s trade alliance. As for why...”

Musashi’s vice president spoke up for him.

“M.H.R.R. is a union of multiple principalities. You are currently fighting the Thirty Years’ War, but the aftereffects and economic friction of the Reformation have left the principalities unable to work together. The Catholic principalities and the Protestant principalities are completely scattered. Also, Hashiba unofficially holds the real power in M.H.R.R. now that Emperor-Chancellor ‘Wahnsinniger’ Rudolf II has been imprisoned for the history recreation. However, Hashiba is on the Catholic side. If the Protestant nation of England became the base of our trade, Catholic Hashiba is in danger of a pincer attack from the Protestants within M.H.R.R. and Hexagone Française. Isn’t that right?”

The vice president let out a quick breath and shrugged.

“I was planning to use that danger to the P.A. Oda-influenced M.H.R.R. to draw Tres España into the deal.”

“Oh? Then will you withdraw your request for this alliance?” asked Toshiie.

Musashi’s vice president turned her back without answering.

“Well, fine.” It was now Toshiie’s turn to shrug and he also snapped his fingers. “Musashi’s alliance won’t actually work. You know that, right?”

“After all,” said Toshiie.

He smiled at how Matsu copied the movements of his mouth.

“Allying with England means joining their side. England is Protestant, but M.H.R.R. is rejecting the alliance despite being partially Protestant. Once Musashi joins the Protestant side, you’ll get – at best – Holland and the people of Kantou and Hokuriku. K.P.A. Italia will probably want to trade, but Tres España is sure to stop them. And once M.H.R.R., Tres España, and K.P.A. Italia are out, Hexagone Française will be surrounded and thus unable to take the initiative and join.”

Partway through, Matsu found herself unable to keep up with his mouth movements and started glaring at him.

...But that reaction is so cute.

With that thought, he raised his right hand and stroked her hair. The action put the surrounding people on guard, but he did not mind. He simply opened his mouth and continued speaking.

“The real problem is that the Musashi has no armaments to deal with a situation like this. Even if you get English ships to protect you, the other nations will send out privateers to get back at England for doing the same thing to them. At the very least, that will make the European routes hell.”

The Musashi vice president spoke while keeping her back to him.

“The Peace of Augsburg in 1555 means the Catholics must accept the Protestant faith. At the very least, it cannot be used as a reason for an attack.”

“That comes with certain rights attached.”

As Toshiie stroked Matsu’s hair, he moved his hand in the shape of a plain, a house, and a mountain.

“Didn’t your treasurer tell you? Catholicism and Protestantism have different divine transmission, medical, educational, and welfare systems. That makes a large difference in who has the rights to construction, distribution, personnel, and the like. Do you understand? The age of religion bringing war is over. The trigger of conflict is now held by the struggle for rights to the systems that use the blessings of the religion.

“Isn’t it the same with Musashi? Catholics and Protestants are forbidden to proselytize within Musashi. That is partially due to the history recreation, but it also prevents confusion and complications in your economic system and provides a stable system centered on Shintoism. Having a primary religion allows you to much more easily manage divine transmissions, medicine, and welfare.”

He then turned to the girl with long black hair who stood next to the vice president.

“The successor to the Asama Shrine there should know that very- ow, ow, ow! That hurts, Ma-chan! I promise I’m not even slightly interested in these other girls!”

He pulled a lollipop from his pocket and handed it to Matsu who had turned away from him.

“Anyway, England and Musashi may be able to form a trade alliance, but if you do...well, assume we’ll get mad and come to crush you. And that would be a problem for England, wouldn’t it? That’s why I have a suggestion for England here.”

He took a breath and dropped a single coin from his right hand.

“If possible, could you crush Musashi?”

The instant the coin was swallowed up by his shadow on the floor, the large door into the hall opened behind him.

Beyond there, the even larger entrance to the building and Oxford's main gate were already open. Through them, the darkness, the lights of London, and the Musashi in the distant land port could all be seen.

However, light surrounded the Musashi.

“P.A. Oda belongs to the Mlasi faith, so it has Testamenta Arma yet was not given a Logismo Oplo. So instead, our master gave a weapon to each member of the Five Great Peaks and Six Heavenly Demon Army. This is what our master gave Ma-chan and me.”

He took a breath and indicated the bluish-white light that surrounded the Musashi and covered almost the entire third level.

“Israfil. It uses the healing power of the depths of the earth to preserve and deploy the souls of the dead. It effectively strengthens my already skilled necromancy. Wallenstein commanded tens of thousands of troops, but if necessary, I can outdo that history recreation and rouse an army of a million from the underworld. If I use up the entire history of M.H.R.R. and the Landsknechte, I can easily hire an army of that many dead souls. You could call this the Kaga income of a million condemned. Or to give it a more M.H.R.R. appropriate name...”

He took a breath.

“The Kaga Millionen Geist.”

Everyone held their breath at his words and his army, but then they all noticed a certain light. It came from small wings on Matsu's back. When Asama's gaze stopped on the wings that had appeared at some point, she frowned and asked Toshiie a question.

"Those wings of light... Those are different from a normal ghost. That ether light has been altered in some other way."

"You can tell? Yes, Ma-chan has undergone a modification to Israfil to help me out."

"But if you do that..."

"Testament. It becomes a spell, so she constantly needs ether," he explained. "That's why it takes a lot of money to keep our married life from simply vanishing. But..."

He once more pointed at the crowd of light behind him.

"Fairy Queen, it's free this time, so can you give me the order to crush Musashi? After all, Musashi looks like it's going to be trouble. We're having fun conquering westward, but with all this Logismoi Oplo and Westphalia stuff, it feels like you're completely ignoring P.A. Oda. If you keep focusing so much on the Testament Union, the Oda clan is going to get nice and angry. After our attack on Asai, Shibata said 'Okay, I'm gonna celebrate our victory by confessing to Lady Oichi, but let's go mess with Musashi to get things started!' Unfortunately, it didn't seem to surprise you all that much. Anyway, Fairy Queen, could you let us destroy them to let off some steam?"

"Wait." Masazumi was still facing the Fairy Queen, but she looked over her shoulder. "Is P.A. Oda choosing to oppose Musashi?"

"Don't be silly. I never said that. Then again, we'll fight at Sekigahara via Hashiba, so I guess it goes without saying that we're enemies."

Everyone gulped, but Toshiie only shrugged.

“Shibata has really taken a liking to Hashiba though, so it looks like he’s been trying to figure out what to do about the history recreation of their opposition. But if we can get past that, the Oda clan is headed for a clash between Hashiba and Ariadust. It’s not yet known where that will occur, but we already know we’ll be enemies in the future.

“So give me this chance, Fairy Queen. Since this trade alliance won’t work, give me the order to sink the Musashi. You didn’t do it before because you were given a bunch of reasons, but if you lack the firepower, I can lend you more.”

He held his right hand out toward the Fairy Queen and spoke along with Matsu on his shoulder.

“Just as Tres España pointed out, Musashi must attack England to prevent Mary’s execution. And England can attack Musashi using my power. What will you do, England and Musashi? If you do nothing, the other might get in the first attack?”

Toshiie’s question and action awaited two answers among the cautious people.

One was the Fairy Queen’s reply and the other was Musashi Vice President Honda Masazumi’s reply.

How would the two of them answer?

Would they be enemy or ally? That question of expectation filled everyone’s gaze as they silently watched the two.

The space was absent of sound until a sudden noise arrived.

The noise came from the right of the hall. It came running out of the Musashi-side passageway.

“Wait just a minuuuuute!!”

It was the footsteps of Musashi Chancellor and President Aoi Toori running full speed into the hall.

An instantaneous response came from Masazumi who turned toward him with eyebrows raised.

“You idiot! Please tell me you actually changed your clothes!”

“O-of course I did! Just look!”

Aoi leaped across the center of the hall with a ballet-style triple jump and he was did indeed wearing a Far East jacket.

However, his lower half was completely naked.

Chapter 46: Performer in an Unrivalled Field

CHAPTER 46

"Performer in an Unrivalled Field"



If it is not others
That you wish to hear you
Then who is it?

Point Allocation (Self-Declaration)

If it is not others

That you wish to hear you

Then who is it?

Point Allocation (Self-Declaration)

“...!!”

While the waiters and reserve warriors screamed, Matsu’s entire body stiffened.

“K-k-k-k-...!”

“M-Ma-chan!? Ah wah wah. What is it!? Are you going to give a cute ‘kyah’ scream!?”

A moment later, Matsu let out a shout that did indeed begin with a “k” sound.

“Crazy person!!”

“Ah wah wah wah wah! Ma-chan, that’s a bit hard hitting!!”

But amid the shouting, the half-naked boy made sure to strike poses as he looked around cautiously.

“Wh-what’s all this!? What’s going on, everyone!? Ah! Don’t tell me...”

He pointed one hand at Toshiie and the other at Velázquez and Gin.

“This is your doing, isn’t it!?”

“It’s you, idiot.”

Masazumi and Horizon both threw kicks at him from the side. In the time it took him to roll, hit the wall, and bounce back, Gin nodded twice.

“I just remembered. This is how things were at Mikawa and during our attack.”

“Wait a second, Gin. Aren’t you getting used to this a little too quickly?”

Before Gin could answer Velázquez’s question, Masazumi grabbed the idiot’s collar. She wanted to lecture him, but her gaze stopped on the uniform he was wearing.

“Th-this is mine, isn’t it!? What have you done!? What have you done!!?”

“Oh, right. I took off your dress in the girl’s changing room and sat around drinking some tea in the nude, but then I spotted a guy’s jacket and assumed it had to be mine.”

“Speak logically!”

“W-wait, Toori-kun! Th-the girls’ changing room!?”

“What’s the matter, Asama!? I didn’t look around for the clothes that contain those criminally-large boobs of yours or anything! They’re so criminal that I tried on those clothes to lighten your crime, but the chest space was just plain amazing!”

Asama fired an arrow and the idiot broke through the wall. Silence fell while she sighed and wiped sweat from her brow. However, the leader of the English warriors had run over to deal with Toori and he suddenly looked up in realization.

“I-I need to confiscate that! I need to confiscate that bow!!”

“Eh?” Asama suddenly realized what she held in her hands. “Nwoh! Wh-when did this get here!? U-um...uh...a-about this...”

She raised the bow.

“It looks like a bow, but it isn’t!”

“Oh?” The Fairy Queen gave an interested nod. “What a novel new argument. If it is not a bow, then what is it?”

“W-well, i-if you take it apart like this, um...look! This part is a one-string guitar and this is the bow you use to play it. D-do you hear the beautiful music?”

The sound of straining metal sent the many gathered people writhing in pain and Asama used that moment to casually put the bow away in her skirt. However, the Fairy Queen merely moved her eyebrows a little.

“I cannot believe you brought something like that to this meeting hall.”

“W-wait just a moment,” cut in Masazumi.

Everyone turned expectant gazes toward Masazumi with the vague desire that she “do something”.

...Why am I always the one stuck doing things like this?

Nevertheless, she could not let the meeting fall apart here, so she feigned calm.

“To a shrine maiden, a tool such as that is necessary for a variety of rituals. It is a necessity. And look. That idiot remains unharmed despite being shot by it.”

He only remained unharmed due to the *boke* spell of his god of performers, but that did not matter if the excuse worked.

However, the Fairy Queen looked to the half-naked boy standing next to Masazumi and gave a firm nod.

“And how do you explain his state of dress?”

...Why'd you have to bring that up!? Or have I just gotten too used to it!? Is that it!?

She groaned and many different thoughts filled her mind. She considered negative options such as giving into death or giving up on the entire meeting, but her sense of duty won out in the end.

She began sweating below her clothes just as much as Asama.

“Th-that is because...um...”

She tried to think up an excuse and hesitated to speak.

“It’s based on the Testament descriptions. Y’know, the story about the clothes that idiots can’t see.”

...That’s really more of a fairy tale or folklore. If this doesn’t work, I’ll kill that idiot and then myself.

With that thought, she waited for the Fairy Queen’s response. The queen first exchanged a glance with the vice chancellor and vice president to her left and right.

“O-oh? I-is that so?”

...She believed it!? Oh, or are fairy tales acceptable here in the fairy kingdom!?

In that case, Masazumi needed to follow through with it. She smiled and faced Mitotsudaira who stood by the right wall.

“Isn’t that right? That fabric is truly...something else.”

“Y-yes, th-that’s right. Um...he bought it from Heidi’s shop, didn’t he?”

“Kh! Y-yes, yes. Judge, judge. The new clothes made from it caused a fair bit of confusion since idiots could not see them!”

Silver Wolf: “Ma-sa-zu-mi!!”

Marube-ya: “You too, Mito! Both of you are meeting me in the teahouse after this! Don’t you forget it!!”

...Shut up. I’m standing on the front line here. Try to imagine how I’m feeling.

“So...um...Oh, Mr. Jonson. You are a literary man, so surely you can see it.”

“Eh? Oh, yes. Testament. It has an excellent black luster.”

“Oh? But I am holding a white fabric here.”

“Ah! Of course, of course! The light played a trick on my eyes!!”

...I can go this far, can't I? It feels so satisfying.

Masazumi sighed, looked to the Fairy Queen, and lowered her head.

“There seem to have been some misunderstandings, but the people of Musashi knew they were attending a meeting with the Fairy Queen and would never think of bringing weapons with-...”

She heard something solid hit the ground behind her.

Wondering what it was, she turned around and Horizon looked in the same direction.

Lype Katathlipse had fallen to the red carpet on the floor.

“...!?”

The look on Masazumi's face brought a thought to Asama's mind.

...I never knew a human could be so surprised.

However, the Logismo Oplo had fallen almost directly in front of Asama.

...Y-you mean I have to do something about it!?

Masazumi made eye contact with her and Horizon merely tilted her head.

...Eh? Ehhh!? But I don't even have an official position!

As she thought, she heard voices around her.

“Ma-chan, is that what I think it is?”

“Mate, is that I think it is?”

Asama frantically picked it up and shoved it into empty space.

But she got the position wrong.

...*Eh?*

She instead ended up swinging around a giant gunblade and gathering everyone's attention.

“U-um...!”

She forcibly held it to her chest for no real reason and an unpleasant sweat covered her body.

“Oh, th-this!? U-um, it looks like a Logismo Oplo, but it isn't!”

“O-oh. ...Wh-what a novel new argument. Th-then what is it?”

Thank goodness the Fairy Queen is playing along! she thought from the bottom of her heart.

“I-it is, um....O-oh! A body pillow! It's a body pillow! L-look. You put your head here and-... That is a very sharp blade!”

“ ... ”

...This is painful! This silence could not be any more painful!!

Anyway, she thought while forming a desperate smile. I need to go through with this even if it kills me.

“B-but looking at this isn't any fun! I'll do a magic trick instead!”

This time, she really did shove Lype Katathlipse into empty space and then she held her clenched fists out toward the Trumps.

“Now! Which hand is the body pillow in!?”

“Um...” muttered all of the Trumps while lowering their heads.

Without raising their heads, they chose a sacrifice with their gazes. Finally, Howard let out a sigh.

“I...believe it went into the space behind your prin-...”

“Which hand!?”

A shout from a shrine maiden who recited Shinto prayers daily was enough for Howard to give in. With his head still lowered, he pointed at one of the hands.

“Right.”

“Right!? Right, is it!? Oh, wow! There’s nothing in the right hand. Ah! And nothing in the left either. Then where is it!? Oh, dear! And now a Mouse has come from between my breasts. Oh, my. Oh, my. The body pillow has transformed into a Mouse! Ah ha ha ha ha ha! How about that!?”

“C-clap, clap,” added Hanami.

A scattering of applause followed.

Silver Wolf: “Poor thing.”

Gold Mar: “Yeah, I feel bad that this was broadcast pretty much everywhere.”

Flat Vassal: “I guess a cruel fate can await even those without an official position.”

Asama: “A-and whose fault is that!? Whose fault!?”

Actually, whose fault is it? she wondered to herself.

She then heard a voice from the right. It belonged to Velázquez, Tres España’s secretary.

“Come on now, Musashi. Stop getting so worked up and answer our question.”

Before Asama could recall what that was, the vital question for Musashi arrived.

“Aren’t you going to war to rescue Mary just like you did your Princess Horizon?”

Both England and Musashi groaned at that question.

But a sudden voice filled the hall.

“Wait, wait, wait. I don’t get this! Why do we have to go to war!?”

It was Toori.

Asama heard her childhood friend place his hands on Horizon’s shoulders and give a piercing shout.

“Why do we have to...um... What was it!? Out with it!! I might even listen!”

...Th-this could not be worse!

Velázquez scratched at his head.

“This is actually about you. You said you were rescuing that princess at Mikawa, remember? So I’m asking why you aren’t rescuing Mary who is in the same circumstances.”

“Who’s Mary?”

The idiot’s eyebrows really did twist in confusion, so Asama whispered in his ear.

“That Scarred person who rejected Tenzou-kun turned out to be royalty and about to be executed by England.”

“Oh! That guy who made us suspect Tenzou’s gay!! He’s being executed? Why?”

Please listen! thought Asama as she looked toward Horizon.

Horizon may not have understood what “the same circumstances” meant because she only tilted her head.

And so Asama explained just the main points.

“It’s a little more complicated than this, but her execution is one of the factors leading to the armada battle. That’s why Tres España is asking if England is misusing the history recreation to execute her just like with Horizon.”

“Oh, is that it? Old man, you need to explain these things properly. Asama was way easier to understand.”

Asama saw the corner of Velázquez’s mouth stiffen and she began to sympathize with him, but he went on to speak.

“What are you going to do? You being an idiot actually speeds this up. No matter what excuse you make, this execution is still a misuse of the Testament descriptions and you therefore must go to war to rescue Mary. After all, you did the same to us. You can’t attack us and then not attack England.”

“Hm, hm,” muttered Toori with his arms crossed.

...Is this really okay?

Asama gave a slightly worried look and Toori tilted his head and turned to Horizon.

“Hey, Horizon.” He asked a question. “You were the one saved, so what do you think about this?”

“Judge. That is a good question.”

Horizon thought for a moment, but she eventually nodded and turned to Velázquez.

“There is one thing I do not understand.”

“Oh, what’s that?”

“You say this is a misuse of the history recreation just like with me, correct?”

“Testament. That’s what I said.”

“In that case,” she said. “If the executed individual is prepared for her death, isn’t that using it effectively rather than misusing it?”

“Based on human rights and the weight of a life, loss of life should be avoided. I understand that we should prevent loss of life so that mankind’s total population will not drop. But if there is a single exception, that would be a death determined by the history recreation. After all, it is ‘correct’ for that person to die there. It has already been decided by history and that person’s death is within acceptable ranges as far as mankind’s total population is concerned. If the history recreation is accurate, that person’s death fits into the flow of events that allows the world to continue on. In fact, that person’s survival could disturb the flow of history and create even more loss. The human rights of the bearer of an inherited name are based in the historical recreation rather than in the person themselves. Those are the rules. Therefore...”

Therefore...

“If the individual undergoing a death in the history recreation wishes for that death, can it truly be a misuse of that recreation to go through with it?”

Horizon’s words brought a chill to Asama.

...Is she saying what I think she’s saying?

She was saying it was not a misuse of the history recreation to offer up the death of one who wished for their death.

They were giving that person what they wished for. Looking at it that way, she was right.

But Asama noticed a smile on Toori's face and it looked like he had found a good answer.

Just as she began to wonder what that was, he spoke.

“That's right. You don't have your emotions, do you?”

“Judge. I have determined it is an unfortunate thing, but I do indeed lack my emotions. As such, I can think about this in the optimum fashion. ...Tres España, why are you attempting to stop a part of the history recreation that is desired by the affected individual?”

“Well...”

“Please answer me.”

Her piercing words seemed to urge the long-lived man on.

“You are stopping someone from doing what they wish to do. On what basis do you determine whether that is good or evil?”

...*Ah.*

Asama realized why Horizon was confused and why Toori was smiling. And that realization formed words in her heart.

...*Horizon is interested in emotions!!*

Asama understood.

Why had they stopped the death that Horizon desired at Mikawa?

That death had been her proper destiny and she had been prepared to accept that death, so what had made them turn from that proper destiny and oppose it as evil?

...There was justice, the weight of a life, human rights, and plenty of other arguments.

But for him, it had not been anything cool or complicated like that.

...It was simply because he loved her.

He had loved her and that had colored his view of what it meant to lose her.

...From his point of view, it was an evil thing!

And so he could not allow it.

That was hopelessly selfish. She had wanted it and those around him were telling him it was the right thing to do, but he had gone to stop it simply because he did not like it.

And it would have been fine had he done so because he thought it was just, because of the weight of a life, or because of her human rights.

...But he did it because he loved her.

One wrong step and that was nothing but a troublesome misunderstanding.

But, thought Asama. Everyone believed that was the right thing to do.

“I do not understand how you determine whether it is good or evil. If Mary-sama is prepared for her execution, then is it not the right thing to do?”

So...

“Tres España, I apologize, but please stop making this my fault when I do not even understand it. But at the same time...”

Asama understood this as well. If Horizon was willing to ask about this, it meant she was interested in emotions. And so Asama knew what Horizon would say next.

...She would become the same as us!

“If I understand what creates that division between good and evil or I come to understand it and it is not too late, the Far East and I will go to war with England to rescue Mary-sama.”

If she could understand emotions, she could understand the meaning behind stopping death.

And if she understood that, she would do so.

“Okay.”

When she saw Toori smile and nod, Asama gave a bitter smile in her heart. He was always worrying about Horizon, but he intentionally avoided teaching her the important things.

...He waits for her to figure them out on her own.

She was not sure if that qualified as trust.

...But I hope the rest of us can trust in something like that too.

“Isn’t that great, Toori-kun?”

“Ah? What, is your motherly side overpowering you again? More importantly, did you hear Horizon’s answer, Tres España?”

“Testament,” replied the girl with two false arms with a bow. “That answer could be viewed as proof she does not understand the importance of the history recreation, but it also proves she does understand the importance of interpretations.”

“Then...”

“It is simple,” said Tachibana Gin.

She narrowed her eyes and gave a glance toward the Fairy Queen and Futayo.

“We understand that Lady Mary’s execution is very nearly unavoidable now. As such, we must send Tres España a report telling them to prepare a declaration of war.”

“I guess that is how it’ll have to be,” said Toori. “But as for whether this Mary business is a misuse of the history recreation, if she wants for it to happen, then even I understand that it’s up to us. I was involved in this kind of thing before, after all. But that’s exactly why I have to say this.”

He pointed at Velázquez.

“Old man, don’t decide for someone what they think or force them to think a certain way. Not doing that is the standard for pure love porn games. I may be legitimately stupid, but I understand that letting others make your decisions is something different than being an idiot. And on that note...”

“What?”

“If Mary does want to be saved, you can turn to Horizon. If someone falls for this Mary person and Horizon understands what that means, we’ll definitely go to save her. Definitely.”

“Heh,” laughed the Fairy Queen. “Looks like we can’t let our guard down.”

“And keep it that way. After all, Horizon’s emotions are enough to take on the entire world. If possible, you want her to rejoice, don’t you?”

A voice from the south answered that question.

“You know that joy will spread chaos throughout the world, don’t you?”

The south wind carried that question and that sea breeze sent a cloak fluttering about.

...*Maeda Toshiie*.

He spoke with the winged Matsu on his shoulder.

“Now then. Tres España may have backed off, but what about me? England, I have everything set up to go to war with Musashi.”

Toshiie had asked his question.

...This sure is troublesome.

Currently, P.A. Oda had almost entirely unified Kinai and was conquering westward. According to the history recreation, once Hashiba conquered Mouri, they would be done with the Setouchi and Chugoku regions.

But the history recreation had another event occur almost simultaneously with the conquering of Mouri.

...The death of our master.

In 1582, Oda Nobunaga was assassinated by Akechi Mitsuhide during the Honnouji Incident. That meant they had to tread carefully in their attack on Mouri. Their plan was to leave Mouri's primary castle alone while conquering Kyushu and thus setting the general trend in the other areas before fully conquering Mouri. Hashiba was allowed a personal division known as the Ten Spears because warriors needed to be sent to all those different places.

Toshiie had entered M.H.R.R. to assist Hashiba and he had gained the second inherited name of Wallenstein to use Wallenstein's military might and scope of influence to provide backup for Hashiba.

...When moving as many different units as Hashiba does, it's easy to end up attacking in lines, so I need to cover the larger surfaces.

That was also why he was in England now. A relationship with England was needed to suppress Mouri and Hexagone Française from the northern front.

“That was a close one. If England had been swayed by Musashi, it would have ruined a lot of our plans.”

He continued the conversation that had been interrupted by Tres España and Musashi's discussion.

He raised his right hand and Matsu did the same on his shoulder.

“Give the order to attack the Musashi, Fairy Queen.”

As soon as he spoke, a voice cut in.

“Not so fast, Maeda Toshiie.”

That voice of rejection came from directly in front of Toshiie and it did not belong to Musashi's chancellor or princess.

“This is a meeting between Musashi and the Fairy Queen. Outsiders will be treated as such.”

Musashi's vice president kept her back to him, but she turned her head to face him. She shot a sharp look that threatened to stab into his eyes.

...Ohh?

He found it cute how Matsu trembled a bit on his shoulder.

...Oh, no. She shouldn't be afraid of anything now that she's a ghost.

If she was afraid...

...It means I'm still inexperienced.

He sank into thought and the other members of P.A. Oda's student council, chancellor's officers, and Demon Army came to mind.

“What a terrible deal.”

According to the history recreation, he would survive the longest of all the Oda clan's retainers. That was why a ghost body had been chosen to ensure that he "would not die".

That led him to feel jealous when listening to Tres España and Musashi's exchange. He was jealous of their freedom to discuss the preservation of life rather than the prevention of death.

But at the same time...

...All of the people around me will die before me, and yet they're so amazing.

Out of the Oda clan's retainers and the Demon Army, he was deemed the least successful militarily. How did it make any sense that he would live longer than those who could do so much more than him?

For that reason, he wanted to live his life to its fullest for the sake of all those others who lived now.

And part of that was how he could help them here.

...Musashi could bring chaos to our actions, so it stands in our way.

"Who is the real outsider, Musashi?" he asked. "You are an outsider to our history."

"So what if we are?"

Musashi's vice president turned fully toward him and he spotted a crumpled memo pad in her hand.

"Communication is difficult without sign frames. Let me say one thing, messenger of P.A. Oda, possessor of Mercenary King Wallenstein's army, and ruler of the Maeda clan."

She pointed her right finger at him.

"You will soon be fully excluded from this meeting hall."

“Don’t be ridiculous.”

Masazumi ignored what Toshiie said. Ridiculous or not, she would win if it worked.

...And the true victory here is the rising balance between those who play the leading parts.

Crushing your opponent would create resentment and being crushed would lead to loss. Treating meetings like a battle would put other nations on their guard, eliminate possible negotiation partners, and eventually make enemies of many different nations.

So a true victory was to make a deal that benefited both sides.

The meeting would benefit both of them and allow them to rise higher. That was best.

...In that case...

Who was she holding this meeting with and who should she benefit alongside?

Tres España? No.

P.A. Oda? No.

The Fairy Queen and her. England and Musashi. Those were the leading parts of this meeting.

So she first had to apologize for turning her back on the queen and...

“Fairy Queen, due to the change in the situation and interactions between nations, forming the trade alliance has become difficult. I would like to withdraw that suggestion. Will you allow that?”

“Testament. I would like that as well. In fact, that was always just a brief aside, was it not? It was a fantastical story meant to entertain this theatre-loving queen. After all, if we were to form a trade alliance like that, England would make great advances and incredible profits in the name of the Fairy Queen. What the other nations said or did would change nothing. I would be waited on by servants much younger than the old, worn-out Trumps while I bathed in gold coins, ate pudding, and was otherwise marvelous and successful. However, that would violate the history recreation and we can’t have that.”

Masazumi heard the Fairy Queen stand and swing her arms. The Trumps fixed their posture, so she had likely glanced over at them.

Masazumi then heard Elizabeth speak from behind her.

“The Trumps are enough for me. So what do you have to offer besides that fantastical story? Answer me, Musashi Vice President. I am fond of reality. I am the child of fairy and man, but I prefer the real world to the world of dreams in which the fairies live. So give me your demand. If it is realistic, I will grant it.”

“In that case,” said Masazumi while looking straight at Toshiie. “I would ask that you cancel your contract with Mercenary King Wallenstein.”

Toshiie could not understand what Masazumi was after.

...Are you stupid!? It's my recruiting that will allow them to fight the armada battle!

Matsu nodded repeatedly on his shoulder.

“U-u-u-u-...!”

“I know, right!? You can go ahead and call her utterly stupid, Ma-chan! C’mon, nice and loud.”

Matsu pointed at Elizabeth

“Ugly old hag!”

“Ah wah wah wah wah! Insulting our employer is simply too wonderful, Machan!”

Anyway...

“What is the meaning of this, Musashi Vice President?”

The Fairy Queen also did not seem to understand the meaning behind the girl’s request.

Elizabeth frowned as she looked at her back. The glare would also occasionally reach him over the girl’s shoulder, but he decided that was within the margin of error.

“You understand the situation, don’t you?” asked Toshiie. “England needs a large force of warriors to defend their land and fight the naval battle. That is why they are using the mercenary recruitment system to make temporary students out of non-students and building up their forces. And I intend to make up for the rest with my Kaga Millionen Geist. England’s plan for the armada battle is to use my Kaga Millionen Geist mercenary force to fight at sea and the recruited temporary students to fill out their ground defenses. In other words, it is my ghost mercenaries that will be fighting the actual battle and England’s warriors will be the rear guard. That will reduce the number of dead and injured among the English citizens and eliminate the postwar burden. But if they cancel all that preparation...”

He took in a breath and spread his arms.

“Who will take the place of my mercenaries in the naval battle?”

“Judge. First, I would like to check with you about that mercenary system, Mercenary King Wallenstein.”

“Testament. What would You like to ask this mercenary expert?”

“Judge.” She nodded. “You are opposing my request for England to cancel. Does that mean I can think of your mercenary force as a type of business?”

“Testament. War is an economic activity. And to harvest victory, the fertilizer and seeds of personnel are necessary. The warriors I can prepare with money allow one to make a transaction to ensure the success of the harvest festival of war. As such, mercenaries can belong to any nation so long as they are paid and they will even kill each other if divided between enemy and ally. It all comes down to money and there is nothing particularly wrong with that thinking.”

“Judge.”

Musashi’s vice president nodded once more.

He nodded as well, but he had something else to say.

“It is possible for Musashi to hire me as well. Of course, I would be taking twice what England is paying.”

“That is an interesting offer, but where are we supposed to get that money?”

“I thought as much,” said Toshiie before turning back to the Fairy Queen. “Now, Fairy Queen. What will happen if you do not sink the Musashi here? Another nation could do so and take the credit for themselves. After all, the Musashi cannot fight. Even if it is resupplied and repaired at IZUMO, they will then be flying over enemy territory with very few convenient locations like that. They will eventually be worn down and sunk. Which is the better option, Fairy Queen? With me here and with your decision, the result is assured.”

He stretched out his arms to urge her on.

“Come on! Come on! Protect England’s students by sinking the Musashi and fighting the armada battle using my mercenaries! Act now and the sinking of Musashi will be reduced to the point that it is free! Wallenstein is bleeding money with this free service! Then again, I’m a ghost, so I don’t bleed!”

He took a breath.

“What will it be!?”

After he asked, Musashi’s vice president cut in between him and the Fairy Queen.

“Then let me say one thing. I, Honda Masazumi, have a suggestion as Vice President of Musashi Ariadust Academy.”

She took in a breath and spoke slowly.

“We will supply the Musashi as part of the English fleet during the armada battle.”

“She’s planning to treat the Musashi just like a mercenary force!! She is, isn’t she!? Hm!? According to the Testament descriptions, the Far East had warriors without masters who could be hired to work for money. In the Far East’s reservations, that’s interpreted as being mercenaries and used to strengthen the border defenses of the nation with provisional rule over them, but she’s using that method with the Musashi!”

Innocentius grabbed both sides of the *cornice firma* to peer more closely at the Musashi vice president it displayed.

“Mercenaries are a business! Wallenstein can be seen as embodying the mercenary system itself, so she had him assure her of that fact so that Musashi can engage in the mercenary business as part of their trade!”

“And what does that mean, former boy?”

“The Musashi is assumed to be disarmed! But when it’s hired by another nation and made a part of that nation’s fighting force, it is no longer the Far East’s Musashi and becomes a mercenary warship hired by that nation! After all, mercenary soldiers can be hired by any nation because their nationality is considered irrelevant!”

The mercenary business eliminated one's nationality and made them a part of the hiring nation.

That meant Musashi's disarmament would vanish when it was under another nation's control.

"That is the same as entering the other nations' protection without forming an alliance!"

Galileo then spoke his thoughts.

"And if they take part in the history recreation like with the armada battle, they can avoid being freely manipulated by the hiring nation."

"Testament. That's right. If they only take part in history recreation battles, the mission is over once the recreation is complete. The Musashi will not be used for other selfish ends. And there are plenty of nations who have their hands full preparing the military force they need for the history recreation. However, what matters more is what they gain by being hired as mercenaries."

...It's been a while since my imagination has made me gulp.

"The Musashi can acquire weaponry as 'necessary businesses materials'. Isn't that right?"

"It depends how far they can 'interpret' the disarmament forced upon them."

"We'll both use it to our own benefit to the best we can. But..."

Innocentius sighed and sat back down in his chair.

"This resolves all the problems between England and Musashi in one fell swoop."

"I would like to use England's stockpiles of weapons for the Musashi. All other expenses will be free of charge. In exchange, I would like permission to trade with the ships of other nations that visit England's ports while we are trading with

England. That should allow for some small-scale intermediate trade on England's part. Also, the Musashi will fight the armada battle in place of England's fleet."

Masazumi nodded as she spoke.

"Maeda Toshiie, can you offer a better product to our employer?"

Maeda Toshiie took a deep breath and finally looked up at the ceiling.

"Musashi Vice President."

"Yes?"

"I can't leave empty-handed. The others will laugh at me if I do. Niwa pretending to cry and sympathize with me is the worst. If you believe her, she'll reveal it all on the divine network and leave a scar in your heart."

Yeah, I know where you're coming from there, thought Masazumi. This guy has a tough life too.

"We will give you appropriate thanks for cutting into your business."

"In that case," he said. "I would like to ask one thing. Although it might end up being a hint to you."

That question was...

"Have you ever been to Avalon?"

"Eh?"

She had heard that word before, but where?

"...!"

As soon as she started to think, the Trumps to her right suddenly grew defensive.

This reaction from England reminded Masazumi.

...I heard it from Scarred...no, Mary!

She had heard that word when asking about the Princess Disappearances while eating yakiniku on the beach. It was a meaningful enough term to produce a reaction from England.

...What is going on?

But Toshiie used both hands to calm them down and then faced Masazumi.

“Let me guess, you know of it but have never seen it. Testament.”

In that case...

“So you have only made it that far.”

“With what!?”

Toshiie did not respond. He merely took a step backwards.

“Thank you for the valuable information. I now know that you still do not know everything of the Far East. You have been circling around and around and around the Far East, but that is all you have been doing. Westphalia is looking a long ways off.”

With that, he dropped a coin from his hand. Its falling motion produced a giant white arm that swallowed him up and...

...What!?

Behind him, the collection of bluish-white flames surrounding the Musashi formed a certain shape.

“The Double Border Crest!?”

“Ha ha.” Toshiie’s laughter rang with the nighttime crest in the background.

“Farewell. Fairy Queen, I will be taking the recruiting preparation money as my cancellation fee. Also...”

Also...

“Have a good war, those who still know nothing.”

With that, he vanished.

The pattern of blue flame surrounding the Musashi also vanished.

It had passed by.

“Ohhh, this isn’t good,” muttered Segundo as he watched the *cadena firma* in the darkness.

He then turned to Fusae who was staring out the window.

“Thinking of escaping?”

“Testament. How did you know? Looks like our chancellor really does understand women’s hearts.”

“No, it’s because I wanted to escape through there too. But...”

He sighed and sank back into his chair.

The *cadena firma* was already showing a close up of the Fairy Queen who was announcing the end of the meeting, Musashi’s chancellor who was raising a hand, and Velázquez.

Musashi’s chancellor must have violated Tres España’s moral regulations because he was entirely covered by a mosaic.

“Old man! I’m waiting for the new game! Don’t make it a sad one, though!”

“Just put on some clothes, you idiot. I’ll make you a character with a route, if you don’t.”

“P-please don’t make a porn game modelled on Musashi!”

“What kind of conversation is this?” asked Fusae with a tilt of her head.

Segundo also tilted his head.

“Velázquez sure is young. Oh, but now we don’t need to send out a ship. You can still take the bottle, though. Say hi to Takakane for me.”

“Testament. But can we really let the Musashi act as England’s fleet?”

“Tres España has strengthened its Grande y Felicísima Armada too. Also, not all of the Musashi’s personnel are combat-oriented and they can’t modify it into a full warship if they start arming it now, so there’s room for interpretation. They’re using M.H.R.R.’s mercenary system, so it’s difficult for M.H.R.R. to say anything without rejecting their own system. Also, the other nations will only be watching carefully since it is limited to the armada battle. They probably want to see the Musashi’s actual situation as well as our Grande y Felicísima Armada. Fusae, what is your opinion of having the Musashi as an enemy?”

“Well... If we view them as a giant city, we can bomb them since we can fly too. They may be large, but we have the advantage when it comes to attack since we can move above and below them. After all, smaller ships are faster and a smaller target. Also, the armada battle will be fought while circling England, so the Musashi will not be invading the Tres Españan mainland. In that case, we don’t need to face them head-on to stop them. If we bomb them from above and destroy the weapons on the top surface, we can board them and end it.”

“Testament. With the short time they have, they will only be able to load weapons on the top. Yes... They may be large and difficult to sink, but they have little offensive power. What tactics of theirs do we need to watch out for?”

“I’d like to hear your opinion on that, chancellor.”

“Well...” Segundo crossed his arms. “I’m afraid of them ramming us with their gravitational cruising, but the Musashi is not a warship and thus has thin physical armor. Damage from ramming would hinder their ability to move afterwards, so they will likely primarily use cannons. However, the Musashi can ascend quite

easily, so I think it will be surprisingly difficult to bomb them from above. Instead of ordinary bombing...”

He made a wave-like motion with his hand.

“We should focus on attacking in waves that including a retreat. If we repeat the process by creating a circular formation and rotating it, the battle is ours. And if we add in additional movement, the Musashi will grow fragile. It’s a basic wheel formation. There’s nothing new about it.”

“It’s plenty new once you start controlling that circular formation at high altitude. We only have about ten more days, so we need to do some training.”

“Don’t you know what to do better than me?”

“And I’m saying I agree with you. All that’s left is what modifications to make.”

She took a breath and cracked her neck to the left and right, but then the student council room’s door flew open.

“Chancellor!!”

Juana stood in the light of the open door. She held a basket of water bottles and took a step forward.

“About what England just decided...!!”

She trailed off when she saw Segundo with Fusae.

“Hi there,” said Fusae with a raised hand, but Juana only looked back and forth between them.

“A-...”

She took in a breath and frowned while tears welled up in her eyes.

“Adultery!? How impure can you be!?”

She slammed the door shut and ran away.

“Wait, wait, wait!”

Segundo beckoned toward her and Fusae spoke with a tone of admiration.

“Ju really is funny. And she’s pretty popular despite that.”

“I think it might be *because of* that, not despite it.”

At any rate...

“After a short break, she should logically reject that possibility and return, so you take care of things then, Fusae.”

“What about you?”

“Testament.” Segundo opened the window and stuck a leg out. “I’m running away. Juana has probably found out I used all the money she was saving.”

The next day, the Musashi was modified in England while the festival continued and several meetings were held relating to the Logismo Oplo and the Peace of Westphalia. The modifications to the Musashi were carried out with each ship in stealth mode so that the information would not be leaked out. The people enjoyed the festival while watching on in interest as sounds of construction came from empty air.

Musashi grew quite busy with the festival and the multiple days of meetings, but things returned more to normal once the residents of the transport ship were allowed to return to the Musashi. However, Naruze had been badly enough injured that she was still sleeping in the sick bay and she would only recover just before the armada battle.

As Tenzou recovered, he also assisted with the repairs and modifications and never tried to disembark to England alone.

Everyone had their own thoughts about the situation as the days of the festival and the Musashi's modifications continued.

Chapter 47: Changing People in a Place of Peace

CHAPTER 47

"Changing People in a Place of Peace"



What does your heart see
When it moves
Yet makes no progress?
Point Allocation (Looking Back)

What does your heart see

When it moves

Yet makes no progress?

Point Allocation (Looking Back)

“These are some odd components. Where do they come from?”

Naomasa found it a strange sight to see a ninja working on the machinery. Since the Musashi had been damaged, every single member of the engine division within the maintenance department had been working to repair it, but Tenzou had arrived the other day in search of a part-time job.

They were deep inside the ship. The giant space filled with pillars was an ether engine hall that was shaped like a water pipe dam. The ship had several ether engine halls, but this was the primary one. The hall was forty meters tall, eighty meters wide, and over four hundred meters long, so people and gods of war were moving about along with the smoke, shimmering, and water, both hot and cold.

Tenzou was lightly moving along the walls and pillars without fear.

“A ninja is surprisingly useful.”

He was the 1st special duty officer and Naomasa’s classmate, but she had immediately made use of him because they needed as much help as they could get. He still hid his face even after removing his shirt and he moved silently, but he could easily travel along even unstable footing and he would buy you coffee before you even realized you wanted it. That last point made him popular with the older men. He primarily transported materials, components, and tools rather than any kind of actual construction.

...He’s skinny and not very tall, so I underestimated him at first.

When he removed his shirt and his inner suit's sleeves, the scars on his back were exposed. He did not have many scars on the front, but the recent scars of being rejected by a girl could be seen near his shoulders.

Naomasa had not been present at the time, but according to Kimi, "He tried to hug the girl who rejected him and the other man penetrated him." She had some questions about the phrasing, though.

"Is that why he looks so down?"

She watched as Tenzou kicked off the wall to approach the others working near the ceiling.

"What do you think of our ninja?" she asked the girls and women working with her.

"Eh?"

The middle-aged women, middle school girls, high school girls, etc. turned toward her while adjusting the hairpins that emitted an upward defensive spell.

"At first, he seemed to be silently brooding over something, but it looks like he's managed to distance himself from it a bit."

"You've been paying attention, Bouteille. But all he's managed to do is distance himself. He isn't looking at what's right in front of him. He's distanced himself and isn't sure if he can make a decision."

"And what decision is that?" asked Naomasa.

Both the older and younger ones nodded.

"When a coward has a chance to make a ton of money, he broods over it. He can't decide whether the status quo is fine or if he should jump at that chance. My husband's the same."

The middle-aged woman shrugged and everyone laughed, but one person looked at the boy running to the ceiling and spoke.

“That’s too bad. I think he could do a lot of good here, but if he’s looking into the distance, he’ll eventually go somewhere else. Once something gets him going, he’ll face that one point and run off. That’s a ninja who can go anywhere and we need to help him here until that happens.”

Naomasa finally nodded and gave them all a bitter smile.

“I’ll leave that to you. I don’t really understand all this, but I do know to listen to my elders. I won’t be able to come here for a while either, so take care of the place.”

“Judge,” they all answered while looking up at the unreliable-looking person making his way to the ceiling.

“Now, what’s going to get him going? Seeing a guy get serious is one of the best parts of being a woman. Let’s give him a chance to think everything through until then.”

The sound of a bell filled the ship to indicate noon.

“If you want to get some fresh air up above, come with me. This ship may be in stealth mode, but the elementary school is having an athletic festival. Watching that should make for a nice break.”

A festival was being held atop a large deck made of wood.

However, this festival on the Musashi’s Murayama was different from the one being held elsewhere. It was an athletic festival surrounded by different festival stands.

This was the Spring Athletic Festival for the elementary school in Murayama. The deck contained hanging banners and was divided between red and white as lively athletic events were held there.

Three sets of eyes watched that movement and cheering from the raised front deck: English Treasurer Howard, Musashi Treasurer Shirojiro, and Treasurer's Aide Heidi. They were exchanging documents and sign frame information.

"Lord Howard, why not make a bet on the upcoming '42.195 km Group Gymnastics' event?"

"No, Musashi has the advantage there. How about the 'Slave Ship Group Sleeping Relay' on Court B?"

"No, that one is going to England. What about the 'Ball Toss – With Fuses'?"

As she listened to the other two speak, Heidi wondered if they had finally cleared the difficulties in trading with England.

Masazumi's consideration had been very helpful. Allowing them to trade with other nations' ships when in England allowed trade between England, Musashi, and another nation and helped make up for most of the losses.

Both Musashi and England were loudly celebrating with the festival.

The Musashi was having anti-ship cannons attached to each of its ships. To preserve its disarmament, the cannons could be stored within the ship or hidden beneath containers.

...But that takes more work and means we can install even fewer.

Also, allowing the construction to be seen would give away what their weaponry was.

"Even simple stealth uses a lot of fuel when applied to each individual ship."

Shinagawa could not be seen, but that was because the simple stealth had erased its shape and ether reactions. The sounds of striking and scraping metal were still perfectly audible.

The armor components stored within the Musashi were being used for repairs and the weapons were being added. Since they also had to add camouflage for the

weapons, the engine division and the maintenance department it belonged to had to be working 24 hours a day.

...Masa also has to repair Jizuri Suzaku, so it can't be easy.

Heidi suddenly noticed the other two facing the same direction. Howard had his arms crossed.

“England does not yet have a stealth spell to envelop such a large ship.”

“You will catch up eventually. Hiding and being hidden are England’s specialties after all,” said Shirojiro. “And on that note, how much of what our 1st special duty officer tells us is true?”

“You mean that Chancellor Henry VIII, who boasted he could remove Excalibur, was a victim of the Princess Disappearances?”

“I see you are not trying to sell that information.”

“Think of it as a present for lending us the Musashi. When you leave England, I will also give a personal gift, so I hope you will accept it. ...Anyway, is there any more serious information you would like to know?”

Shirojiro nodded and indicated behind him with his chin. England’s mainland was there.

“I would like to ask about Double Bloody Mary being Elizabeth’s sister and about Avalon.”

I knew he would ask about that, thought Heidi.

She had already asked Erimaki to record what was said.

“How much information is England hiding?”

“Testament. That is something I...no, it is likely something Jonson, Dudley, and even Her Majesty do not know.”

“You don’t know?”

“Testament,” said Howard with a nod.

At that moment, a cheer rose from the ring of athletic festival spectators.

The current event was the ball toss. The children’s parents were participating, but after that cheer about a minute in, a stray shot flew into the spectators and the battle surpassed all generational boundaries.

Ohiroshiki held a microphone as the commentator.

“Everyone! Everyone! Please stop! You are putting the little girls in danger! But if they’re over ten, feel free to- gah!”

He fell over and no one remained to stop them. Howard smiled a bit when he saw and heard the commotion.

“For better or worse, Musashi is a lively place. To be honest, all the talk of the armada battle and execution has left England without much levity for the past few years.”

“Judge. And I feel like we’ve been left without much seriousness,” gloomily commented Heidi.

“Your vice president should hear it directly from Her Majesty when she is shown Avalon, but the queen and Double Bloody Mary used to enjoy themselves like this in the past.”

Heidi and Shirojiro exchanged a glance as Ohiroshiki recovered the microphone.

“No! You must not do that! Stop! That body part is off limits! My future descendants! My future descendants!!”

The two of them nodded and spoke to Howard.

“Being lively and enjoyable are not necessarily the same.”

Masazumi walked through a dark space.

She was not alone because someone was guiding the way.

“Fairy Queen, you said you were showing me Avalon, but this is the back of the hall. Is there something beyond here?”

“Testament. That is why I am taking you here. I am basically accepting the challenge given by P.A. Oda’s Maeda Toshiie, but I should probably share some other information in addition to Avalon.”

As the fairy Queen continued on, light moved with her. The midday light that illuminated her had traveled with her into the darkness.

They were probably light spirits. Masazumi also entered the five meters of daytime space and it felt just as warm as the sunlight. The light source was located almost directly above, but the Fairy Queen spoke to it.

“I look best with the light a bit to the left.”

Masazumi found it amazing in several ways when the light source shifted left.

They finally reached the back wall of the hall which contained a dark hole. It looked like a door had been removed, but not even the midday light source could illuminate it. The Fairy Queen stopped and Masazumi tilted her head.

“What’s that hole?”

“The passageway to Avalon. I am the gatekeeper, so no one can pass through without my permission. Let me see your head.”

...*Eh?*

Masazumi lowered her head as if bowing and the Fairy Queen suddenly removed the sword portion of her crown and held the blade flat.

“Temporary permission.”

She casually tapped Masazumi’s head thrice.

Masazumi found it a little painful, but she also assumed it was a spell.

“There is no real meaning to it,” said the Fairy Queen while returning the sword to her crown. “It’s set so anyone can pass as long as they’re with a royal.”

“Th-then why did you do it!? Why!? What happened to needing your permission!?”

“While I call it my permission, it’s not really a spell. It’s more based on how I’m feeling. Also, I love the theatre, so try to enjoy this more.”

Masazumi hung her head at that unreasonable lecture. Then the queen waved her right hand to gather her attention and touched the darkness. The darkness thinned and light grew visible on the other side.

...*Eh?*

Masazumi was confused because the wall had no thickness. It had a surface, but a bright space appeared to exist immediately afterwards. She thought about the bright space while following the Fairy Queen into it.

“Is this a harmonic territory?”

“No, it is compressed. The ether forming the space is compressed at the ley line level and a one kilometer square space is contained within the wall. My father created it because he found his personal room too cramped.”

Masazumi frowned at the mention of Elizabeth’s father. Her father was Henry VIII.

...*And he was taken by a Princess Disappearance.*

“What did Chancellor Henry VIII make it for?”

“You will understand soon enough. Letting you see it would be faster than explaining it.”

The Fairy Queen suddenly turned around and pulled on Masazumi’s hand. Before she could think anything more, she was led toward the light.

And she entered it.

Masazumi entered a nighttime world covered in the light of day.

“Eh?”

She saw a grassy field filled with blooming flowers, a forest, and a small stream. The light of day was reaching the field and forest, but the stars were visible in the night sky. She found it odd that light and darkness coexisted like that.

“You must be a weak girl for this much to surprise you. And yet you are used to a boy walking around naked.”

“I can’t really deny either of those, but I’ll be more careful about the latter. But what is...”

Just as she was going to say “this place”, two small figures passed by her.

They were girls. Their blonde hair fluttered through the air and the one in the lead held a wreath up in her hand. The other held up her own wreath to look at as they ran across the large field.

But that was not all of them. The same two girls but in different arrangements of clothes walked through the forest or rode a boat through the pond that the stream led to. They could also be seen eating lunch from a basket, picking flowers, and sleeping in the shade of a tree. Whatever they were doing, one looked in charge and the other would be smiling.

Masazumi knew who they likely were.

“Are these remnants of the past?”

“Testament. Because the ether was compressed, ether races such as Mary and me will leave a mold in the space. This is like a sort of ghost. Looking at it now...” Elizabeth hesitated. “I find it hard to believe I used to be like this.”

Elizabeth began walking between the playing children. Masazumi wondered if there was any meaning behind how she made sure not to get in the way of or obstruct the path of her past self.

“Which one is you, Fairy Queen? It’s hard for Far Easterners to tell Europeans apart.”

“Then I must be a Far Easterner as well.”

“What?”

The Fairy Queen turned toward her after making a path for the two girls who looked at the apples in their hands.

“To be honest, I do not entirely remember which one is me. I think the one pulling the other along is me, but I also remember that my sister used to act more like an older sister.”

She smiled.

“Ether races are born from the ley lines, so they are connected by the ley lines. The connection is even stronger with twin sisters. When we were children and our personalities had not fully formed, our boundaries were thin and we shared each other’s senses a fair bit. It is not as strong as the shared memories of plant, mineral, and spirit races, but it still remains within us, at least a little bit.”

“Then...”

Did Mary, the one to be executed, and Elizabeth, the one doing the executing, understand each other’s feelings?

What Elizabeth said next seemed to confirm that thought.

“It has faded and almost feels like it has been replaced with mere trust, but that is exactly why we made a certain promise.”

Elizabeth turned to the right where the two girls sat by the stream.

One was crying and the other was soothing her. A book sat on the crying one's lap. It was meant for children, but it was a history book. The opened page gave a simplified drawing of a woman climbing the scaffold to be executed.

One girl cried at the page and one soothed her, but which was the elder sister and which the younger?

“I don't remember. It could be me soothing my sister when she learned of her execution or it could be my sister soothing me when I learned of her execution.”

Elizabeth made it sound like there was nothing to be done and Masazumi gulped.

“Should I really know about this?”

“All of the Trumps know and view it as an honor to know. And they all say the same thing when they learn of it.”

The soothing girl from the past opened her mouth just as Elizabeth did.

“Save you from anything.”

Elizabeth continued speaking.

“It really is pathetic. As the Fairy Queen I must preserve the history recreation, so I only have one way to protect the sister who tried to protect me.”

She turned around to look at all the scenes from her past.

“I can only return her to the ley lines.”

She began walking again as if leaving that statement behind and Masazumi was left speechless.

“Not even the Fairy Queen knows which one she is?” asked the treasurer’s aide.

“Testament.” Howard nodded. “That is why there was a bit of a prank during the history recreation of Double Bloody Mary’s enthronement leading to the Fairy Queen’s rule.”

“A prank?”

“Do you know the most common of the pranks pulled by spirits?”

The two facing him exchanged a glance and the aide leaned over while frowning.

“Shiro-kun, is he trying to talk about something inappropriate?”

“Calm down, Heidi. We are on the Musashi. If something happens, we can call for someone.”

Howard realized that a different nation meant differences in common knowledge, but he needed to move the conversation along. It was necessary to preserve the relationship between England and the Far East.

“Have you heard of changelings?”

The aide opened a sign frame. The white fox on her shoulder opened an information page and she nodded while reading it.

“Judge. That is when a spirit swaps out or hides a child. I know all about it.”

Howard just about shouted a complaint about “kids these days”, but he managed to restrain himself. He realized he would need patience more than anything else to continue working with the Far East and he pushed his glasses up his nose.

“Double Bloody Mary worked to return England to Catholicism after it converted to the Anglican Church. She executed members of the Anglican Church, went through an unrewarded marriage to Catholic King Felipe II, and used tyrannical policies to obtain the finances needed to reinstate Catholicism. But the problem

was that she had to do these things despite not liking them, that those actions were met with rejection, and...”

And...

“That she accepted all that rejection for actions that would then be rejected in the future.”

She did what she knew was hopeless. She did not have to do it and she knew it would cause a lot of trouble for her, but she still did it. Of course, she could give reasons for doing it. The history recreation held especially strong meaning in that sense.

...But it isn't the same when others and later history will reject it.

“She knew all too well that everyone would criticize her. It was something someone had to do, but she changed that to mean she had to do it so someone else would not do it in her place. She understood that someone else would suffer if she left it to them.”

“And...what does that have to do with changelings?”

“It seems the Fairy Queen and Double Bloody Mary were switched out.”

“...”

Howard spread his arms toward the two who were at a loss for words and whose expressions stiffened.

“Save you from anything.”

But...

“It isn't known if that was actually done, but Double Bloody Mary left a single event to the very end of her recreation.”

“Was that...?”

“Testament. The execution of three hundred Anglican Church members. The origin of the name Bloody Mary.”

Howard had not been present for that history recreation and he had only heard of it from his predecessors.

But he presented it as undoubted truth because he felt that was his duty.

“The execution of the three hundred was delayed partially because Mary herself wanted to push back the weight of the event, but it was also because her previous actions and the criticism thereof had worn her down to the point that she was in no state to execute anyone. That was why she searched around in the hopes of finding some other interpretation.”

“B-but the Testament Union would never allow that,” said the aide. “England began to prosper under the Fairy Queen’s rule, so they came to suppress you, didn’t they?”

Howard nodded.

“Mary resembled the Fairy Queen, so my predecessors did not let her be seen for fear of hurting the Fairy Queen’s reputation or inspiring sympathy from the public. Sympathy would have been especially bad as it would affect the people’s rejection of her that the history recreation required. Only the leaders of that era knew she and the Fairy Queen were identical. However, that led to the Testament Union growing suspicious that the history recreation was being carried out without her. They therefore investigated that recreation especially strictly and it seems they demanded for days on end that, if she was not going to show herself, the recreation had to be carried out exactly as described. This only wore her down further, but at one point, she suddenly carried out the execution of the three hundred.”

He took a breath.

“She personally faced the three hundred, received wounds from them, and supposedly said this: these scars are the proof that Bloody Mary truly exists.”

This was only known by his predecessors, the former student council and chancellor’s officers. In Elizabeth’s era, those predecessors had either been “executed” or graduated to positions that supported other areas of England, but the records had remained.

“I do not know which one was protected and which one did the protecting. Not even they may know. However, Mary continued the history recreation while hiding her face, the Fairy Queen appeared on the center stage, and we reached the current situation. Mary will only appear to the world at large during her execution. The people may then realize the truth and feel an instant of sympathy. That may be the one salvation for her.”

Howard took a breath and lightly clapped his hands to signal a change of subject.

“That is England’s history recreation. I certainly did not expect the queen to allow the Far East’s Musashi to intrude on it, but it may have been because of your sympathy with Double Bloody Mary.”

The aide and treasurer nodded a few times and whispered to each other.

“Does that mean Masazumi was invited because Mary took pity on Tenzou-kun? Nice connection-building!”

“Heidi, don’t say she took pity on him. Say she sympathized with how unpopular he is.”

Speaking loud enough for others to hear seemed to be the custom on Musashi.

“Anyway,” said Howard as he watched the surrounding festival and listened to the sounds of Musashi’s repairs and alterations. “It seems the queen is thinking about how to maintain a relationship with Musashi. Avalon is a place where she can accomplish that. There, she can show her own past and the world’s future.”

“The world’s future?”

“Testament. Chancellor Henry VIII was performing research there.”

Namely...

“Research into what exactly the Apocalypse is.”

“This is the Apocalypse.”

The Fairy Queen pointed at what resembled a pond surrounded by white birch trees. Masazumi tilted her head when she saw it.

...The Apocalypse?

She questioned it because of how unassuming a thing it was.

In the grassy field was this black spring with a radius of about three meters. Because of the state of the sky, the fact that it reflected the night sky was not odd. But...

“What do you mean this is the Apocalypse? There are theories saying it means the world will end, the humans who create history will be wiped out, or time will stop, but I didn’t think there was any definite theory. So how can you say this is the Apocalypse?”

“Testament. Musashi Vice President, as the Apocalypse approaches, what is being produced throughout the world.”

“Mysterious phenomena...”

Her own words led her to a realization. This was a compressed space that altered the ley lines and England was a modified land created by ley line management. When she added in her answer to the Fairy Queen’s question...

“Are the mysterious phenomena occurring in England being compressed here?”

“Testament. I cannot say it is being done perfectly, though. If the Apocalypse brings mysterious phenomena, then those phenomena must be the Apocalypse on a small scale or the pawns it uses. This may not be the Apocalypse itself, but it was created by it. Because England can manage its ley lines, the ley line distortions caused by the Apocalypse have been focused here.”

Masazumi looked back at the black spring and noticed it simply existed there with no ripples at all.

But she felt the need to ask just to be sure.

“Do you have any proof?”

“Testament. Throw something in. Then you will understand.”

She wondered if she had anything she could throw away.

After some hesitation and thought about the size, she removed her left glove and threw it.

...If the Apocalypse has an element of “nothingness”, it might be swallowed up and never come back.

With that expectation, she told herself to calm down.

The glove fell into the black spring, but it did not sink in. Instead, it floated on top.

“Eh?”

“Be quiet and keep watching.”

Masazumi did as she was told and something grew.

They were flowers.

Bluish-white flowers grew to surround the glove. They extended, blossomed, expanded, and scattered.

...The glove is disappearing?

The floating glove sank into the group of flowers. No, it looked more like it was being consumed. The flowers opened and scattered, starting with the areas touching the Apocalypse.

The silent blossoming finally approached its peak, but then it settled down.

Nothing remained and the black spring was as empty as ever. However, Masazumi noticed bluish-white flowers blooming around the edge of the black spring.

“Chrysanthemum flowers. I hear they are funeral flowers in the Far East. Also, it seems these flowers are not made to leave seeds behind.”

“What was that?”

Masazumi looked back and forth between the gloved palm of her right hand and the black spring.

“Those bluish-white flowers appeared to be made of ether light, so it looked like the object was being reduced to ether. In that case, does the Apocalypse reduce the world to ether?”

“Testament. An excellent observation. Everyone who sees this says that. However, they are all skilled people, so you must have excellent eyes to match their perception. For that, let me tell you one thing. No matter what this Apocalypse spring consumes, the total amount of ether within it never changes. Do you understand what that means? ...Yes. The spring does not break the object down to ether. It uses that process to annihilate the ether.”

Meaning...

“We believe the Apocalypse eliminates ether and creates absolute nothingness.”

It took Masazumi a moment to understand what the Fairy Queen had said.

...It eliminates ether?

Ether was the element space was composed of and the world was made up of space, so the world was filled with ether. Thus, even when using a spell to create “nothingness”, that was merely creating a space filled with “nothingness ether”.

It was impossible to annihilate it.

It was unthinkable to go beyond “nothingness” and create a space with no ether.

But...

“The ether of the eliminated object isn’t added?”

“Testament. The ether making up that glove has been eliminated. That means your glove’s worth of ether has disappeared from this world. That creates a hole which creates a distortion and so a small-scale mysterious phenomenon will likely occur,” explained the Fairy Queen. “But don’t worry about it. Apparently, the ley lines occasionally create holes like this at junctions in the ether flow. We live in a world of ether, so we cannot perceive the hole itself, but the hole erodes the ether on the boundary with creates a spherical film. We refer to that film as the ‘wreath’.”

“How do those holes form?”

“Testament. Think of it like blood. What happens if blood does not circulate and instead gathers?”

That was known as congestion of the blood and it led to...

“Necrosis of the affected region, right?”

“Testament. Do you like injuries?”

“Only if they don’t leave a scar.”

Upon saying that, she realized the necrotic area would leave a hole in the form of a scar.

The Fairy Queen nodded with a look that said “so you finally understand”.

“The ley line distortions are a deteriorated ability to circulate ether. However, the ley lines naturally heal such parts. The distortions will cause natural disasters, but that eliminates what is distorting the ley line. Normally, the ley line hole is closed through that process. This hole before us has been forcibly opened using an even stronger congestion created by placing multiple distortions on top of each other. On top of that, the ley line being eroded around the hole has been expanded to preserve the hole. These holes have the ability to eliminate ether, but that ability is not infinite and the smaller-scale ones are quickly closed by the ley lines. This one is in a state of balance between the two.”

“In other words, the ether that touches the wound of nothingness festers and becomes a mysterious phenomenon?”

“Testament.” The Fairy Queen gave a bitter smile, crossed her arms, and looked at the black spring. “While playing as a child, we would throw any trash we had in here, but thinking back, that may have been the cause of the mysterious phenomena in England.”

“I-I’d rather not hear that kind of national secret.”

“Don’t worry about it,” said the Fairy Queen again.

She then took a step back so she could look out over the spring rather than peer down into it.

“By detecting the ley line distortions, we can indirectly perceive the holes, but perceiving the holes themselves is impossible. As it is true ‘nothingness’ that eliminates even ether, it contains no elements of information, memory, or time. That is why we can only think of them as ‘holes’ based on the shape of their

erosion of the ley lines. It is a bit like detecting Musashi's information-blocking stealth."

"Are you saying Musashi is a distortion to the world?"

"Questions I can only agree to are quite boring."

"True."

The two female politicians exchanged bitter smiles.

Masazumi then looked away from the spring and took a step back just like the queen.

"Fairy Queen, do you think the Apocalypse will distort the entire world and create too much 'nothingness' for the ley lines to self-repair?"

"Testament. Most of us share that understanding."

Masazumi started to nod, but she suddenly realized what the queen had said.

...Most of us?

If Elizabeth meant the Trumps and England's researchers when she said "us", it was strange to say "most" of them. They were all one group, so they should all agree.

In that case...

"Most of us? What other nation are you referring to?"

"Testament. That was quite perceptive."

As soon as she spoke, the past of the two girls arrived.

Masazumi watched the two girls who were dressed in clothing containing quite a bit of cloth.

Their outfits were even more extravagant than before, so they had likely been attending some kind of party. The fact that children were wearing heels instead of walking shoes further proved it.

...Was it a birthday party?

She guessed that because the two of them arrived at a white birch tree near the spring. One removed her shoes and stood with her back to the tree while the other held something in the air.

“ ... ”

She traced the object across the tree trunk above the other's head.

They then reversed the process. They both held something and carved their heights into the tree trunk.

They then compared their heights to make sure they were the same.

“ ...! ”

They both smiled and ran toward the stream while singing something.

The two female politicians watched them leave, but the queen opened her mouth. She started with a sigh.

“That takes me back. The tree we used to track our heights was shorter then too.”

Masazumi realized what that meant and she looked up at the white birch tree that now grew quite high.

There, she saw the scars in the trunk and the item used to make them.

...A cross on a branch?

The silver cross was about three meters up where it hung from a chain around a branch. It had decorations and jewels and looked like it would be owned by a royal or noble.

However...

“Doesn’t the Protestant Anglican Church ban crosses?”

“Then whose do you think it is?”

There was no way she could know, but why had the queen asked?

...Because she thinks I know the answer.

In that case, she had to remember the relationship between England and the Catholics.

After a few moments of thought, she muttered the answer. It was something Mary had told Tenzou and Tenzou had told her.

“Long time, my friend.”

Those words which indicated the answer brought a change to Elizabeth’s expression.

She narrowed her eyes and the corners of her mouth rose in a smile.

“Testament. My father always said that when he came here. When my rule began, I recalled the different things he would say such as being able to pull out Excalibur. A method for doing that might have existed and he opened up this place, but I did not know whose cross this was. I investigated as much as possible, but it was too late by the time I found the answer. Its owner was no longer of this world.”

As for his name...

“Tres España Chancellor and M.H.R.R. Emperor-Chancellor Carlos I.”

Masazumi instantly brought to mind the information that name gave her.

Chancellor Carlos I had been the king of two nations, but he had not spoken Español and had remained almost exclusively in M.H.R.R.

“Is your research here being leaked to M.H.R.R.?”

“It is not being leaked. It is being officially sent there. We research what the Apocalypse’s ‘nothingness’ is and M.H.R.R. researches countermeasures. From the beginning, Carlos I was passing our research to M.H.R.R.’s Protestants. It is quite advantageous for England. Of course, the Apocalypse is a global issue and some reports are also sent to the Testament Union’s Catholic nations.”

Elizabeth looked to Masazumi rather than the spring.

“Do you understand the meaning behind Avalon now? We have no proof, so we can’t take any major action, but we are attempting to stop the Apocalypse in our own way. And this goes beyond M.H.R.R. and us. K.P.A. Italia and Tres España are the same.”

Those two nations were news to Masazumi. Her eyebrows rose and the queen showed her teeth in a smile.

“Some of Carlos I’s possessions remain in Tres España and I have heard they are currently doing some investigation about him. As for K.P.A. Italia, it seems the Papa-Schola himself is sending handwritten letters to the other nations and making promises to exchange information. ...Do you understand?” she asked.

“We are following the history recreation, but we are also working out Apocalypse countermeasures as we wait for the Peace of Westphalia. Since P.A. Oda has started that Genesis Project of theirs, they should be thinking the same as us. Musashi, you have now stepped up onto the same stage as the rest of us.”

She laughed.

“Do you understand why Maeda Toshiie mentioned Avalon now?”

“Judge.” Masazumi nodded and narrowed her eyes as she looked up at the cross hanging overhead. “I suppose I should say I’m glad we came to England.”

“You had better be. I revealed my past and our secrets to you.”

Just as the queen smiled bitterly, a sign frame suddenly appeared next to her face. It was staticky and had no video, but it was definitely Dudley’s voice.

“E-e-e-e-emergency, Your Majesty. That idiot has taken everyone to Ex. Caliburn!”

“Eh? What idiot? What are you talking about, Dudley?”

Masazumi was more accustomed to these things, so she caught on before Dudley could answer. She had had enough, so she spoke up first.

“Our idiot is causing problems again.”

“I-I do not understand what’s going on!”

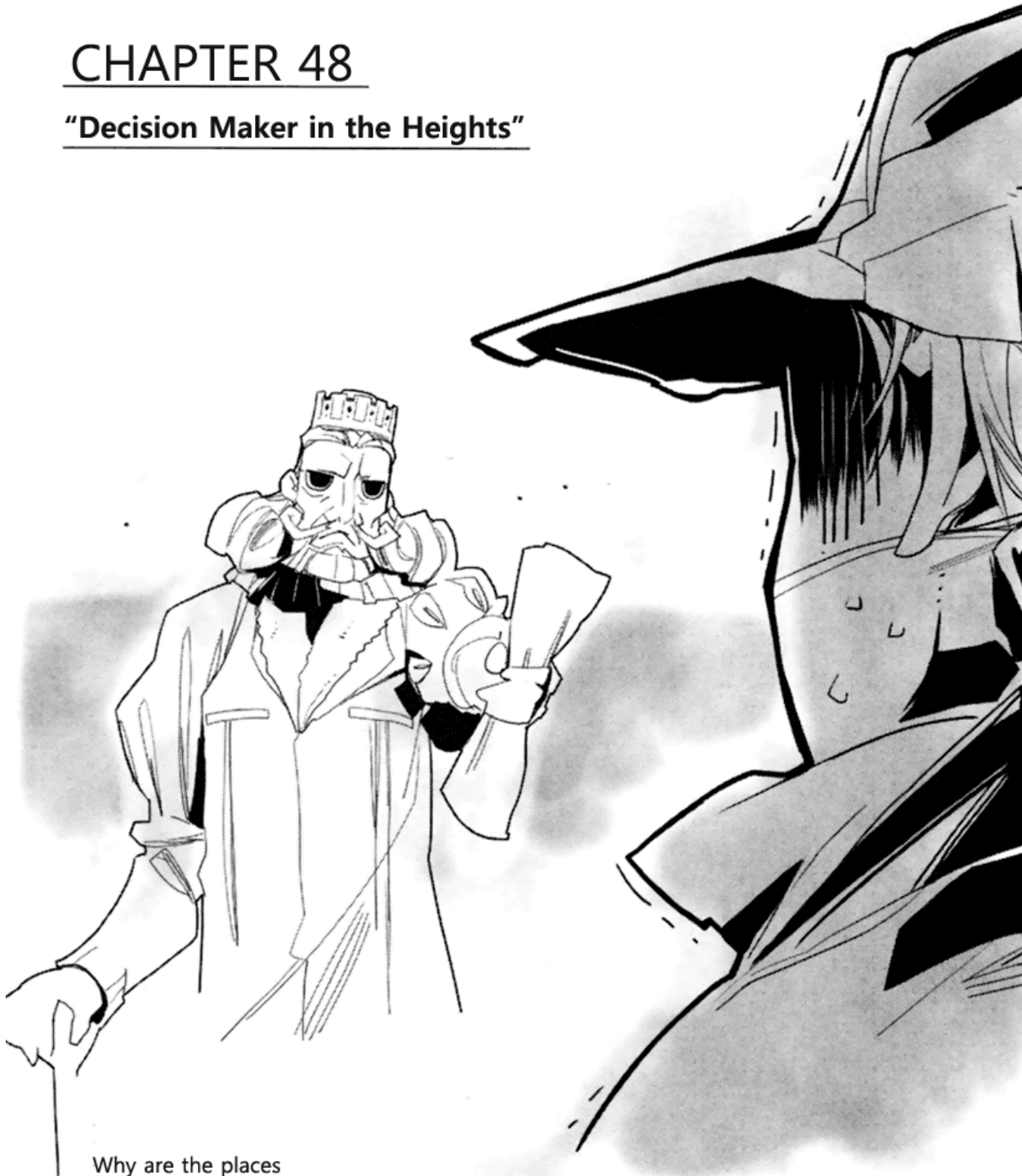
Masazumi’s shoulders and head drooped at the thought of trying to understand that idiot.

“Our idiot is probably trying to pull out Ex. Caliburn because he gave into the festive mood or something.”

Chapter 48: Decision Maker in the Heights

CHAPTER 48

"Decision Maker in the Heights"



Why are the places
Where we make up our minds
Always the places that remain in our memories?
Point Allocation (Resolve)

Why are the places

Where we make up our minds

Always the places that remain in our memories?

Point Allocation (Resolve)

The past few days had been filled with a single purpose for Mary.

That purpose was finding a way to fight the stress of being locked up.

She was not allowed to leave her room. A bath and bathroom were set up in a different room off the stairway landing, but it was not a hot spring so it would waste money on water and heating to take baths again and again.

Reading books made for a decent diversion, but it was not enough.

...I'm just too used to moving around.

Her days of constant walking and working had left her unable to relax without moving her body.

That was why she had asked the person in charge of her for a small loom.

She had used looms a few times in the fourth level village, but she had never done anything more than make fabric. This was her first time creating something for herself.

She manipulated the colored thread while moving the loom affixed to her desk as if hitting it. Once she got a set tempo going, the time would fly by. When she took an occasional break, she could hear the festival noises outside, but the fact that she was accomplishing something made her feel like she was participating in the festival.

She had spent her time on that today as well, but the commotion outside was different.

She heard charming and joyful shouts coming from Ex. Caliburn's tower to the north.

...Eh?

Ex. Caliburn was being modified into an Andamio de la Ejecución and the work should have been continuing throughout the festival, but there seemed to be a large number of people and voices there now.

Wondering why, she peered out through the northern shutters and saw some familiar people.

First, she saw England's mercantile guild celebrating with bottles of alcohol and a gathering of artists such as Jonson. They were all quite drunk. Shakespeare was only a bit tipsy, but her cheeks were red and she had trouble keeping her balance despite sitting still.

At the center of them all was Musashi's fairy known as the Wet Man. He was naked except for a skirt made of empty bottles and he spun around and around.

“Okay! I'm gonna pull it out now! I'm gonna pull out Excalibur!!”

A cold sweat covered Mary when she saw the surrounding adults give an excited cheer.

...Sh-should he really be doing that?

...They do say not even death can cure a fool.

Futayo thought to herself in front of the stairway entrance at the bottom of Excalibur's northwestern tower. Three chairs were placed in the anteroom in order to block the entrance to the stairs. Sitting in those chairs were Futayo herself, Asama, and Suzu.

Futayo looked past Suzu and at Asama. Her hair was worn up just like Futayo's and her cheeks were a bit flushed.

“Asama-sama, I did not know you could handle that much alcohol.”

“Eh? Oh, I can't really. For the match, I used sacred sake which is made from rice. Sake has the power to purify, so it's the same as water once my shrine maiden liver negates the intoxication. I couldn't go that far with wine or beer. My limit then would probably be only about two dozen bottles.”

...She too is something else.

Suzu looked up and nodded toward the excited voices.

“They sound like...they're having fun.”

“Judge, but they will probably get in trouble for it later,” said Futayo. “Anyway, why are you two here?”

“Well, I went along with Suzu-san to recover Adele's mobile shell, but on the way, we ran across Toori-kun who was chasing the townsfolk around with his apatosaurus. And then...”

Futayo wondered why Asama continued speaking on the assumption that she would not ask about that last statement.

“And then when Toori-kun said he was going to try to remove Excalibur, I thought about how to lecture him, but thankfully Mr. Jonson was there. At the pub, that is. He was simply too weak compared to me, so it ended up being 16 straight matches against the mercantile guild. But to make a long story short, I accumulated a lot of Blessings through the self-purification substitution using refined sake and I think the god was happy too. Suzu-san was on her way here anyway, so it was two birds with one stone.”

Even as they spoke, some student guards wielding spears stood before them. They had likely been given orders, but they were confused by the girls' presence, their fellow Englishman up above, and the joyful shouts.

A man who appeared to be their commander stepped out, faced Suzu, and raised his hand.

“Ambassador!”

His sharp voice caused Suzu to tremble and cover her ears.

“Ah,” said the commander and booing erupted around him.

“You don’t get it! You don’t get it all, commander! Making her cry would be an international incident!”

“Testament! What are you gonna do if she cries, commander!? It’d be an international incident for my heart as well!”

“What are you even talking about? But I’m sorry. I’m really sorry, everyone!”

Good, good, thought Futayo as she nodded twice. *I am glad they get along so well.*

Still, she wanted to avoid any conflict here.

...But I have my duty to meet Masazumi.

However, if she left the situation to Asama, it would quickly lead to an international incident caused by arrows.

The chancellor was an idiot, but he seemed to understand that. He had told her, “If anything happens, just talk it out. In other words, keep talking and buy me some time.”

...I must talk it out.

She did not have the same special skills as Masazumi, but she had something to talk about.

And so she began to speak to the gathered guards.

“Calm down, you bastards.”

“Is that any way to talk to someone you want to calm down!?”

“Do not worry about it. Anyway, this is an excellent opportunity. There is something I have been wondering about ever since arriving in England and I was hoping you could give me an answer.”

The men tilted their heads in confusion and she nodded once.

“Are you listening?” she began. “While in England, especially while protecting our ambassador, I have indicated I have no intent to fight by following the standard custom and fastening the top of my skirt so it is harder to move my legs.”

“Wh-what about it?”

“Judge,” said Futayo. “When I sit in a chair like this, the men who pass by all give a quick but definite glance inside the fastener. Why is that? It is merely the bottom of the inner suit that is usually visible. Why do you wish to see it so badly when there is a fastener over it?”

The men slowly hung their heads and fell to their knees.

...H-huh? Did it just get quieter down below?

Mary saw spirits of the emotion of repentance on the first floor of the northwestern tower. Meanwhile, spirits of joy were surrounding the rooftop. Even in her limited view through the cracked open shutters, she could see the shimmering spirit effect.

“Okay! Time to try and pull it out!”

Eh? she thought as the naked boy began to move.

His actions brought two images out from her memory.

The first was when she had once tried to pull out Excalibur.

She remembered the color of disappointment that her sister had been unable to fully hide. The memory was still strong enough that she wanted to apologize.

And the second...

...Master Tenzou.

That boy had helped her maintain the graveyard and do many other things. And most importantly...

...He said "it must be tough" for Mary.

Whenever she had been thanked for her actions, it had contained the assumption that she had no choice as it was her duty. However, he had been different. Instead of saying "it's tough, but do your best", he had said "it must be tough even though she's doing her best". That slight difference in nuance had been enough to make her cry. She may have been imagining it, but it had been too much for her.

Currently, the naked boy made the same pose as Tenzou had in the graveyard.

"Is that...?"

He was pushing down on the sword to widen the hole before he pulled it out. She wondered if the Wet Man had been watching back then. As if to answer that question, he spoke up.

"This is a technique our ninja showed me."

He pushed down.

"Let's try it!"

He pulled as hard as he could.

Everyone watched the naked boy put all his strength into standing up on his tiptoes and arching his back as if measuring his back muscles.

“Nwohhhhh!!”

He could not pull it out.

“Kwaaaah!”

He still could not pull it out.

“Mapyopergerpipipi!”

Even when he changed his shout, he could not pull it out.

But as he gave those strange cries, he lowered his hips into a weightlifting stance. Instead of pulling, he tried to lift up.

“Daaaah!”

But he could not pull it out.

And so while grabbing the guard from either side and pushing up, he held the blade between his thighs.

“Kyohhhh!”

Nevertheless, he could not pull it out. However, he did not give up. He made several more attempts which resulted in holding Excalibur in his crotch and grinding up and down on it.

“Kwohhh! What!? What is this thrill!? The name of the sword that threatens to split my crotch just like my butt is Excalibur! D-dammit! Don’t think I’m going to lose in an Excalibur competition! But I still can’t pull it out! I can’t pull out my Excalibur! Wait! Which Excalibur are you talking about, dammit!? Am I gonna die of ecstasy!? Am I!?”

Mary was unsure what much of anything outside the conjunctions and interjections meant, but the naked boy suddenly let go. His shoulders rose and fell as he caught his breath and he turned to the others.

“Okay, that ends today’s practice. The real deal begins tomorrow and continues until-...”

“This isn’t happening again!!” they all shouted back.

Mary clenched her fists and nodded in agreement with them, but then she saw a certain scene.

The naked boy stood behind Ex. Caliburn and faced her. The sword hid his crotch as he struck a pose to point at her.

“Are you listening!?”

...*Eh?*

She wondered what this was about. She was forbidden to approach those outside, so she could not reply. Also, he would not be able to see her because she was looking out from the shutters.

Nevertheless, he smiled and spoke.

“Let me tell you something.”

“Tell me what?”

Without thinking, she muttered to herself and his smile strengthened.

“My Urban Name is Mr. Impossible, so it’s 100% correct that I can’t pull out Ex. Caliburn. If I managed to do that without really trying, the Testament Union and Old Man Innocen would never shut up about it. But...”

But...

“Someone other than me... That is, one of my comrades will definitely pull out Excalibur.”

Because...

“After all, it sounds like it’ll be tough for England otherwise.”

That reminded Mary of an important memory. And the return of the memory reminded her of what had happened to her then: tears had spilled from her eyes and her vision had blurred.

...*Ah.*

The person who now stood before her had spoken to England.

The one who had been with her back then had spoken to her.

She wiped at the corners of her eyes while thinking about the difference between the two and what it meant.

The naked boy then looked to the southeastern tower to her right.

“Oh, or is she over there?”

...*D-does he not know what he’s doing!?*

Mary was completely dumbfounded for a moment, but she soon smiled bitterly.

That just had to be the kind of spirit he was.

She was thankful and she watched him leave along with the others.

“Retreat! The queen is coming down the school’s front staircase and is on her way here!”

Everyone gave panicked shouts and began leaving more quickly. After watching them leave, Mary looked at Ex. Caliburn which remained and she slowly nodded.

...They can enjoy themselves even with an execution so close.

But...

“It’s not possible.”

It would not be possible for someone to pull out Ex. Caliburn.

“Or for me to see it happen.”

By the time Elizabeth arrived on the scene, the culprits had already escaped.

All that remained were the student guards collapsed on their knees in the anteroom.

“What is going on!?”

That question brought tears to the men’s eyes.

“But...but... How could she say the part visible from the fastener while sitting is the bottom of the stomach and not the crotch? There’s no blood, tears, dreams, or anything in that answer!”

“What in the world are you talking about!?”

Dudley and Cecil’s hesitant attempts to calm her allowed Elizabeth to restrain her angry shouts.

“Dammit.” She crossed her arms. “What is this!? All of you have been acting strange since the Musashi arrived!”

“Judge,” calmly replied Masazumi after catching up. “That’s because the Musashi brought some strange people with it.”

“Another strange component. This is clearly a set of handcuffs, but who asked for them?”

Tenzou muttered to himself while looking at the components packed inside the leather bag he used to transport them. He had a lot of questions, but the inside of the bag had several divisions and the tools, screws, adhesive, etc. were separated into them.

Occasionally, he would transport food, drink, or charms that reduced fatigue or strengthened one's abilities. It was not a safe workplace. At set intervals, IZUMO engineers would arrive with shrine workers to apply spells to alleviate heat and other things from the corridors, but most of the accidents occurred outside the main corridors. Once, a pipe had burst and the hot air from the boiler had leaked out. It would have been dangerous if those within range had not had defensive spells.

At the time, Naomasa had calmly held out her false arm and tightened the heated valve.

...Why is Naomasa-dono so manly?

He was a little impressed by this new side of his classmate as he filled the bag with components. This time, there were flowers as well. They were an offering for someone who had died in an accident. They were also used to mark the dangerous areas and had spells applied to tune the area and display a sign frame with information on the accident.

The thought of a flower offering reminded Tenzou of the loss of someone who naturally followed the idea of flowers.

“...”

He shook his head.

...I mustn't let myself be trapped by my thoughts.

She had left of her own free will.

It was necessary for England's history recreation and it meant something different from Horizon's execution. No one was trying to misuse the history recreation to kill Mary.

She was prepared for this and that was why she had enjoyed that last time available to her without revealing any of it.

...I hope she enjoyed it, but...

He had no way to know if his spirit of service had been successful, but he could not help but wonder.

How much of a salvation had he been before her execution? Had he been any help at all?

...Was I?

“...”

This isn't good, he thought.

He began thinking about her at the slightest provocation.

...That was just a brief dream.

“Yes. In the end, I'm nothing more than an unpopular guy.”

As he reached for the tools and other items he was to transport, he felt a sudden pull on his left hip.

Hm? he wondered as he turned around.

There, he found two familiar people.

One was Toori who was naked with a towel around his neck and the other wore work clothes despite being a king.

“Vice Principal We!!”

“Do not think we will sit idly by and let you call us ‘we’!!”

Tenzou received a lecture.

Naomasa and everyone else turned toward a sudden voice in the transportation area. They found a ninja being lectured by a king in front of a naked boy.

They all sighed.

“Oh, right. Those up top sent a divine transmission saying the chancellor had done something so we need to hide him here.”

“We can ignore that breast sommelier, but the Musashi King sure comes by for inspections a lot. Although he hasn’t as much recently because he was sent as an advisor for England’s agriculture.”

“I’m just glad he doesn’t try to help where he isn’t needed.”

The others nodded in agreement while Naomasa watched the exchange between the naked boy and the other two. Tenzou nodded again and again while Musashi King Yoshinao talked on and on about something with his arms crossed.

“Honestly, your class has no sense of manners! You could learn a thing or two from Azuma-kun!”

“B-but, vice principal, Azuma-dono has recently been saying se-...saying an inappropriate word a lot.”

“I have no idea what you are trying to say, but even if he is a former imperial, there is nothing wrong with casually abbreviating the word second to ‘sec’.”

“Wh-what if it was the plural of ‘sec’?”

“It would not be. No one abbreviates it when using it as an actual unit.”

“Nwoooooh! Why do I feel like you got away from me on that one!?”

That idiot's got a surprising amount of energy, thought Naomasa.

Yoshinao then handed Tenzou what he held in his right hand.

Naomasa could see it was a hand-drawn map with a good bit of detail.

“What you have here is one of the foreign maps that Musashi's ninja guild keeps in secret, isn't it? The other nations are forbidden to hand over maps for fear of invasion, but the Musashi can be useful when it comes to surveying. The ninja guild falls under the PR committee, and they are left in charge of the documents when the Musashi is used to create those maps. Of course, those maps will be returned upon leaving England and spells can detect if an illegal duplicate has been made.”

But...

“Look. Xs have been added to a map of England and they seem to approach London and Oxford. Also, this looks like a hand-drawn copy. Can you explain this?”

Naomasa's comrades exchanged looks around her.

They understood what this meant and she understood the double and triple meaning as well.

...That idiot!

It was most likely an infiltration route leading to the Tower of London. It was a nearly straight line along the shortest route. The Xs were likely the locations of the guard units. He had said nothing about Mary for the past few days, he had remained silent, and he had seemed to distance himself from the others, but...

...Don't you know that no one likes a guy who doesn't know when to quit?

However, a nearby middle-aged woman resting her arm on a large wrench rejected that thought.

“A guy who doesn't know when to quit is only hated after you've broken up.”

She hoped that was true and she thought about helping him out, but he spoke up before she could.

“That is...um...the location of the guar-...”

“Ah, you idiot,” someone muttered.

But a moment later, the naked boy suddenly shouted out.

“Ahhh!? For real? Tenzou, don’t tell me you’re gonna attack the Tower of London!”

Yoshinao shuddered at the loud voice of the idiot who had followed him in here.

...That could cause an international incident, so do not shout it so loudly!!

From what he had heard, that idiot had also done something stupid in London and then run away.

He had asked the idiot what that “something stupid” was and the boy had replied “I tried to pull out Ex. Caliburn, but it was surprisingly cold when I held it in my crotch!” Yoshinao had considered killing the boy on the spot, but he had decided against it because it would have only caused more trouble.

He had allowed the idiot to accompany him until the commotion died down, but the boy had stripped off his clothes “because it’s hot”.

...And now he is cornering us with his words!

Yoshinao was prepared to settle this peacefully, but the idiot was making that difficult.

“You can’t do that! Right, We!? Isn’t an attack on the Tower of London a really bad idea!? Do you think this ninja is gonna use his trick from the graveyard and bend back in surprise at how cold Ex. Caliburn is on his crotch!?”

“I am not going to do that!”

...Quiet down both of you.

However, there was something he had to say.

Naomasa heard Yoshinao give a sudden shout. He made an announcement as the King of Musashi that was loud enough to drown out Toori's voice.

“My goodness! Is this a strategy map for a date, Tenzou-kun!?”

...A date?

Tenzou was clearly taken aback and the Musashi King spread out the map in front of him.

Toori smiled and the Musashi King gave a groan before tapping at the map without waiting for Tenzou's response.

“These Xs represent popular festival stands, don't they!?”

“Wait a second, We! Aren't they guard units!?”

“No! You do not understand, you fool! These are the locations of high society festival stands! We can see why a teenage boy would be embarrassed to have looked into all this. We cannot blame you for making a hand-drawn copy for your own purposes. You intended to dispose of it after the date, didn't you?”

“Eh? Oh... Judge.”

Tenzou frantically answered and the Musashi King nodded.

“Good. Then let us give you some advice to make your date a success.”

He pulled out a red pen and added some marks of his own.

“When we went around with our wife, the stands were stationed...here, here, and here. And Tenzou-kun, you seem to be avoiding the central plaza where the children are, but the children will no longer be there when you have your date.”

“Wait a second, We! Aren’t you being a little too nice!? A living date map like this is like a national treasure!”

“Do not be ridiculous. It is only natural for the King of Musashi to help out the people of Musashi.”

He drew another line on the map.

“If you are going, do so boldly yet stealthily. That is the trick to a secret lover’s rendezvous.”

“...Judge.”

Naomasa saw Tenzou take the map. The others exchanged looks, but those looks contained small smiles.

However, Yoshinao clapped his hands.

“What are you all doing!? Work! This is the time for work! The King of Musashi loves hard workers! Faithfully carry out your respective duties!!”

Tenzou stored the map in the slim case attached to his waist hard point and sighed.

...They must know.

Everyone knew what he wanted to do deep down.

But, he thought as he restrained his leaping heart and placed the items for transport in the leather bag.

...I must not go.

After all...

...First, Mary-dono might find me to be a bother.

Second, if he did go, it would undoubtedly cause an international incident.

And third...

...A ninja follows his orders.

If someone wanted it and ordered it of him, he would definitely have to go.

But if they did not, he must not go. That was the law of the ninja.

If Mary, the one to be saved, did not want this as he suspected in his first condition, he had absolutely no reason to go.

He wished he had asked or told her. He wished one of the two of them had made it clear how they felt about the other.

...I regret that.

Belatedly, he thought about one of his horrible classmates.

...How did he manage ten years with this kind of regret?

He wondered if he would end up doing the same. He had a plan for rescuing her yet valued his identity as a ninja, so would he not go rescue her and then continue to feel this pain?

He could not abandon his identity as a ninja. That was where his family was and, more importantly, that was how he had spent his time with her.

He felt he could not forget that he had gained the trust he had because he was a ninja.

And so he had no choice but to give up.

He carved that conclusion into his heart and managed to calm his leaping heart, but a naked boy suddenly walked up next to him with a smile.

“Wait a second, Tenzou. Are you seriously going on a date? Can you really do it? Don’t mess up your line, okay?”

Tenzou thought about what Toori had said.

...It would be so much easier if he just told me to go rescue Mary-dono.

But he doubted that would happen. No, that boy’s actions were always unpredictable, so it was possible he would give that order on a whim.

...But then the others would stop me.

He lowered his head when he realized he was only thinking about all this because he had yet to make up his mind.

The Musashi King’s words had been filled with things he had been avoiding, but that had placed his original worries right in front of him.

Again and again, he wondered what to do, but he could not find an answer and he always returned to the same question he had no answer to.

...How does Mary-dono feel about me?

In that instant, Toori spoke up while looking at Tenzou’s back.

“Tenzou, you said Scarred healed the wound on your back, right?”

But...

“Isn’t this it? Behind your right shoulder blade? ...But from what I can see, the wound has healed, but it’s left a nice scar. You sure this was healed properly?”

“What?”

Tenzou looked toward the back he could not see. The right shoulder blade Toori had mentioned was there.

The wound he received protecting Scarred was also there, but she had supposedly healed it.

She had also said she could heal without leaving a scar.

“Is there...a scar?”

“Judge. Calling it ‘nice’ might be a bit weird, but...it’s perfectly white and clearly different from the other scars.”

Tenzou gasped at Toori’s confused comment.

...Is this...?

When they had parted, he had asked Mary what kind of guy she liked and she had given the following answer:

“If I did meet someone like that, I would want to be someone who leaves a lifelong scar on him.”

She had left the scar.

And that had been before the festival and back when he had seen who she truly was in the graveyard and exchanged words of reconciliation.

“ ... ”

“Hey, what is it, Tenzou?”

It sounded less like Toori was legitimately asking and more like he knew the answer but wanted Tenzou to say it himself.

Tenzou clenched his teeth and silently gathered the items for transport.

...I am a ninja!

As a ninja, he would start by completing the mission given to him.

But afterwards...

“Toori-dono, I...”

“Yeah? What is it?”

“Judge.” He nodded. “I will probably make an important announcement on the final day of the festival!”

He carried the filled leather bag over his shoulder and stood up. He glanced toward Toori, the Musashi King, Naomasa, and all those who had accepted him while he did nothing but hesitate.

...Yes. Mary-dono must have felt this same comfort in that fourth level village.

“I just remembered I have another mission to take care of.”

More specifically...

“I previously made a promise without realizing it.”

Naomasa watched the three guys speak and begin to part ways.

The Musashi King began his inspection, Tenzou ran up the wall, and Toori began wandering around.

...Guys don't get as selfish, but they can get completely out of control when they start working together.

She then saw two people walking down the corridor the guys had deserted. One was someone not often seen here.

“Mito? What's a knight doing here? We can't fix your silver chains, you know?”

“Judge. I know that. I wanted to ask you to help with some training today. You aren’t attending the academy and you don’t seem to be reading your divine messages, so I came directly.”

“What, does it bother you that much that you lost to the Trumps’ hound?”

“Judge,” replied the knight without hesitation. She also held up the handbag in her right hand. “Can I reserve some training time? I am still not one hundred percent recovered or healed, so I will be training alongside my recovery until the festival ends.”

“Is that some venison you bought from Heidi? Do you always eat that when you’re injured? I can’t stand it because it tastes like liver.”

“I view it as a type of medicine. Venison has a lot of blood and little fat, so it is perfect for healing. I eat a lot, train a lot, and sleep a lot.”

“Judge, judge.” Naomasa nodded twice and narrowed her eyes as she looked the wolf in the eye. “Do you have a plan for getting stronger?”

“It’s hard to say.”

“What do you mean?”

Naomasa frowned and Mitotsudaira smiled.

“After all, it’s nothing more than peeling an apple.”

“What?”

Naomasa tilted her head in confusion. She wondered if the girl had finally gone insane, but Mitotsudaira’s smile grew bitter.

“Judge. If it surprises my own classmate, I should be fine. I’m sure it will surprise her as well.” She gave a quick nod. “I will be leaving then. I have the divine transmission open, so contact me if anything comes up. Adele is putting together a strategy for the armada battle right now, so I have to supervise.”

“Neshinbara isn’t putting together the strategy?”

Mitotsudaira raised her right hand and shook her head.

“There really does seem to be a curse. Naruze isn’t healed yet either, so there’s a lot to worry about with this battle. Adele and I both work with land battles, so I don’t know how well we can plan for a naval battle. We are having a meeting about that with the guard unit and Futayo.”

“Do your best. We’re trying to come up with what ideas we can as well.”

“What are you planning?”

“Well,” said Naomasa.

...What we’re doing is less planning and more working out what’s possible with the Musashi’s technology.

They had used the gravitational cruising while travelling from the attack to England, but that had all been done completely by the book. It sounded good if one said they did not do anything reckless or strange, but...

“Everyone is thinking about what we should have done or could have done back then. We’re asking ‘Musashi’ whether it’s possible and, if so, we’re making any alterations needed for it. This probably has a lot to do with your planning, so how about we work together more closely from now on? Also...”

She then pointed behind Mitotsudaira and sighed.

“I asked IZUMO headquarters for an engineer to repair Jizuri Suzaku, but they sent you?”

“Hey, hey, hey. Is that any way to talk to me?”

A short girl appeared from behind Mitotsudaira’s hair. She wore a work cloak and her hair was worn up high to disguise her short height.

Mitotsudaira glanced over at the girl who wore the uniform of Qing-Takeda's Kakura Academy.

"Um, who is this?"

"I can tell you that without an introduction. She's Mishina Hiro. Old man Taizou's granddaughter."

Naomasa glared down at Hiro.

"I assumed you were still being an idiot in Qing-Takeda, but I see you were visiting IZUMO's headquarters on their floating island and have finally made it here."

"If I want to mess around with gods of war and aerial ships every day, the headquarters and Musashi would be the best places, right? And you don't let people touch Jizuri Suzaku often, Masa."

Hiro showed her teeth off in a smile.

"I transferred to a Far Eastern Academy on Izumo's floating island this year, but I never thought I would get to help out on the Musashi so quickly. I've discussed it with my grandpa and I'm thinking of transferring here, so try to beat Tres España if you can."

"Oh, dear." Mitotsudaira looked at Naomasa with a smile. "That's a lot of responsibility, 'Masa'."

"Judge." Naomasa shrugged. "I feel like crying with all this trouble piled up on me. ...But whatever. Hiro, go look around the ship a bit. This will be your workplace in an hour. You can touch Jizuri Suzaku for two hours each night. That's enough, isn't it?"

"Testament," replied Hiro. But she soon smiled bitterly and corrected it to "judge".

She then produced a folded bundle of papers from her dirty cloak.

“I’ve already come up with a plan, so I just need to bring it all together and check where the lines connect. It’s a pain that you’re up against Michiyuki Byakko, but I’ll make sure you aren’t too worn out.”

So...

“I’d like it if you won and came to get me.”

“It is a shame you could not come out to greet me, Master Muneshige, but there is a joy in being made to wait. My short trip also taught me that work feels different depending on if you have a daily routine or not.”

In a white hospital room, a girl in a vermilion uniform spoke to a boy sleeping in a bed.

Her armband said “3rd Special Duty – Tachibana Gin” and she pulled something from a paper bag she had brought with her.

“I thought about bringing food back from England as a souvenir, but nothing had enough of a punch to it. That is why I searched for something that would make for a more lasting memento and also be practical.”

She placed the item on the bedside table.

“This is an English cursed doll. It is a joke product, but some say it gives you a nightmare of having turned into a scarecrow. ...Oh? Master Muneshige, you do not seem to be sleeping well. Is your anesthesia running out?”

Gin spoke to Muneshige while checking on the cross-shaped heavy charms for holy spells that were stabbed into his body. They were all fine.

He also had a restraining spell to keep him from moving carelessly if he were to wake.

Gin recalled the keyword for releasing that spell.

“Testament. If you shout ‘I love Gin! Amore!!’ five times, it will be released. However, no one expects that from you.”

She then brought her own face to that face she had been away from for too long. She remained like that for several seconds.

“ ... ”

She finally moved away with a flush in her cheeks and took a breath.

“Honestly, this is pathetic. Three months for a full recovery? In that time, I must take back everything in the armada battle that we must lose.”

But...

“It has been a while since I had time to feel unease and hope, Master Muneshige. I will probably be unable to visit or contact you for a while...so please wait for me.”

Her light tone belied her words and she turned toward the window where the sun had started to set.

“When will we be able to view this sky together in our own home? After three months, the hydrangeas in our garden will be gone.”

As she spoke, Gin suddenly looked down.

She tilted her head in confusion as she looked at the person sitting on a bench in the plaza in front of the hospital. The person had her back to a tree and her hair was blowing toward Gin.

“Lady Juana?”

Gin noticed the woman’s long ears were drooping and that she was writing a letter in pen.

“Is that...?”

Gin realized a certain fact while looking down at the movements of Juana’s hand from above.

To check on that fact, she bowed to Muneshige, made some quick adjustments to the bed, and temporarily left the hospital room. She muttered to herself while walking down the hallway and still holding the paper bag.

“Why would Lady Juana be writing that letter?”

She had clearly seen the movements of Juana’s hand as she wrote the recipient’s name.

“Why would she be writing one of the letters that girl sends to the chancellor!?”

Chapter 49: Liar in the Marketplace

CHAPTER 49

"Liar in the Marketplace"



Is it stronger
To believe something is a lie
Than to claim it is a lie?
Point Allocation (Truth)

Is it stronger

To believe something is a lie

Than to claim it is a lie?

Point Allocation (Truth)

The setting sun illuminated a slope. The sloped road had a rounded bottom and the dirt was hardened by rain and sun.

People sat along either side of the road with their backs to rough houses with the walls painted white. Those walls occasionally displayed Tres España's emblem and the address.

Someone walked along the road to the market at the top of the slope.

It was Segundo. He spoke with the people on the road while reading the letter in his hand.

"Mister, a lot happened today."

She's started referring to "today" a lot lately, he thought. It must be because the letters are more frequent.

"At the church, the teacher talked about where we are headed. After Tres España loses the armada battle, Tres España will apparently become poor. That will be bad for the church because it is supported by donations, so we will be going to some other place. Having too many people stay here would cause problems for the people of this land."

...The kids have it tough too.

"I guess everyone knows we will lose the armada battle."

The other day, the Grande y Felicísima Armada had used some of its strength to damage the Musashi. Based on that, he was convinced it could bring down the Musashi.

However, England's fleet would remain unharmed even if they did sink the Musashi.

Tres España's basic plan was to bring about the confused fighting in the early stages of the armada battle and quickly advance to the stage where they fought while retreating. During that stage, they would fire on England and begin a scattered landing operation while using their stealth technology to hold back the English fleet long enough to escape. Even if they were retreating, they would take a very offensive approach to defense. England's fleet had to attack and could therefore more easily crumble and they also had to worry about the English mainland.

However, the inclusion of the Musashi had changed that.

With the Musashi taking the English fleet's place, England could fortify their defenses and preserve their fighting force.

...That is what England views as true victory here.

Segundo did not know what state the Musashi would be in once the naval battle ended, but the Grande y Felicísima Armada would not be unharmed. On the other hand, England's original fleet would be completely unharmed and have their history recreation victory.

After it was worn down and had to reveal its strength in battle, the Grande y Felicísima Armada's value would drop. Unharmed, England would be able to declare victory and gain supporters while Tres España would have lost all value and be forced into decline.

The Grande y Felicísima Armada would only be able to celebrate what it had done and would ultimately be a disappointment to the people of Tres España. After all, the great force before their eyes now would be damaged and lead to their defeat.

“But I’ll do something about it. I’ll do whatever I can.”

Realizing he should be at the top of the slope soon, he looked down at the paper again.

“Mister, you fight in wars right?”

Right now, I manage them, he replied in his heart.

From the flow of her words, he assumed she would ask him not to fight.

However...

“Will you save someone again?”

“ ... ”

The meaning of those words caused Segundo to gasp.

She was not telling him not to fight.

He understood why. Even if she hoped for peace, the history recreation remained.

“Everyone knows that, don’t they?”

He almost tripped on a stone as he wondered if that girl would go to some other land if the economic situation grew even worse after the war. And if so, would that mean he no longer received the letters?

...Velázquez said she’s in a church near the city.

The church apparently doubled as an orphanage and was one of the many that Chancellor Carlos I had constructed.

The girl who lived there used her words to plead to him.

There was something she wanted him to do through this war.

“Please save someone. Please continue to save people. But please don’t die.”

“Testament,” said Segundo.

“That is my only request and it will always be my request. I don’t know how long these will keep reaching you, but I hope you will keep reading them.”

And...

“I hope you can always be with me.”

Segundo assumed she meant that figuratively.

“Don’t worry.” He closed the letter and looked up. “I can’t save people very well, but there is one thing I can save.”

He stopped walking with the market directly ahead.

However, the market was not functioning. The stands contained people rather than products.

They were all men and women past middle age. They covered the street and roofs as well and Segundo nodded toward them all.

“Okay, everyone. Let’s truly save Tres España this time.”

“This looks like a hopeless situation.”

Juana heard Gin speak in the light of the setting sun.

They were currently in front of the white hospital building. Gin had placed a paper bag on the wooden bench and Juana had hidden her letter below the board she had been writing it on.

However, Gin did not even glance at the letter.

“What is going on here, Lady Juana? Why are you writing one of the letters that girl sends to the chancellor?”

“Well...”

Juana thought about how to explain it or if it would be possible to lie about it, but Gin nodded and spoke.

“I see three possible answers:

“1: You are writing the letter for her out of a kindness unimaginable from your appearance.

“2: As a wicked yet somehow likely option, you are simply making fun of the chancellor.

“3: Your large workload and harsh personality have made you go crazy.

“Now, which is it, Lady Juana?”

“I-is it just me or do all of those include a terrible image of me!?”

“Testament.” Gin’s shoulders lowered. “So it is not #1. That is a relief. The worst possibility I had considered was that you were writing in the girl’s place because she had died. That was the most hopeless answer.”

...*Ah.*

The wording of the question aside, Gin had been considerate in her own way. Juana sometimes had trouble keeping up with that girl who was born from a martial arts obsessed bloodline, but she was married and was able to live her life well enough. Juana had also heard that Gin had changed after she began living with Muneshige. That was why Juana was hesitant yet still spoke up.

“I am amazed you knew what I was writing.”

“Testament. I am well-trained in viewing a distant target as part of my marksmanship training. Also, my husband Tachibana Muneshige has the double

inherited name of the postal system's great Garcia de Ceballos. He has taught me quite a few techniques related to letters. One of those is how to read what is being written from the movements of the writer's hand."

"What a dangerous person."

"I view myself as a wife who is skilled at helping her husband. But there are occasional mistakes of fate. For example, I once thought up a cannon-fired letter to help with delivery. I test fired the letter into a noble's hilltop house using Arcabuz Cruz, but it broke through the entire house and was misdelivered to the house next door. Master Muneshige praised my destructive power, but he told me to only help with the office work from then on."

...She's physically dangerous too!

Juana sighed, brought a hand to her cheek, and made up her mind to tell the truth.

"I am not writing the letter in her place. You can rest easy as far as that is concerned."

"Then where is the long-lived girl the chancellor rescued?"

"Testament. I am that girl, Tachibana Gin."

Gin frowned as Juana picked up the letter and the board that covered it. She was embarrassed to show another what she had written, so she clutched it to her chest.

"Let's go for a short walk. The hospital's visiting hours continue for a fair bit longer, so you don't have to worry. Now, let's talk about a certain misunderstanding."

"A misunderstanding?"

"Testament. It is somewhat similar to a fairy's changeling."

Juana spoke while walking toward the path away from the hospital and to the city.

“During that war filled with loss for him, he saved a single life. It was a child that had survived in a certain long-lived village. The child seemed to have been sheltered by the village’s people and he saved her just before the city was burned to the ground. He had great expectations for her: ‘I’m so glad you survived.’ ‘It will be okay.’ ‘I’m sure you have a happy future waiting for you.’ But...”

She turned west to face the hill containing the slums.

“Tres España’s insistence on pure blood leads to some people being persecuted: the half-lived. Because they cannot be immediately distinguished from the long-lived, they are hated and thought of as failures.”

Gin’s footsteps grew a little harsher as she walked behind her, but Juana continued regardless.

“So what if the rescued girl was not long-lived? What if an act of adultery had been committed in that long-lived village and a child that had to be kept a secret had been born? What if she was not being sheltered but had been locked up?”

What would that mean?

“What if the fear of all that had left her unable to trust the person who rescued her and the foolish child had lied about herself? What if she had thought lying was the only way to obtain the happiness that person spoke of? But what if it was only through that lie that she could gain her current position and repay him for saving her?”

She took a breath as she walked.

“And...”

And...

“What if she was thankful for what that original lie had given her, but she also felt absolute regret over it?”

She smiled bitterly because she knew it was all her own fault.

Even if she had been a child and even if her upbringing had been far from ideal, she had made the wrong choice at the very beginning.

However...

“What am I supposed to do, Tachibana Gin? All I want is...”

All she wanted was ...

“To be at least a small help to him.”

Dear mister,

I am thankful for what you did for me.

No matter how many times I say it, I don't know if it gets through to you and I may be troubling you, but I truly am thankful that you saved me.

But I do wonder something. All you do is save people, but are you also being saved?

How can I be of some help to you?

“Ah, that throw went a bit high.”

A tall person in a track suit lightly jumped atop a vast deck floating in the sky. It was Fusae who caught a white ball in the glove on her right hand. She then landed on her vanishing feet.

“That was too close, Taka. If it falls off, we'll have to pay to replace it.”

“I’m throwing it where you can catch it. That’s how this works, right?”

“Eh? But I was throwing a lot of them where I didn’t think you could catch them.”

“It’s different for me since I’m a genius who can catch any ball.”

When Takakane caught the ball without looking at it, Fusae gave an impressed cry.

“Can you catch it while facing backwards?”

“Easily. We’ve tried most every trick, remember?”

“That’s right,” said Fusae while swinging her arm to tell him to throw it.

There were other students on the deck as well, but they were performing maintenance or checking on the deck.

“Fusae, are you not going to remove Michiyuki Byakko yet?”

“Byakko likes it here, so I’ll do that last. Then I’ll hand this San Lorenzo over to the chancellor. He’ll be observing the armada battle, after all. This ship’s plenty sturdy, so it won’t go down easy even if the Musashi attacks.”

“And we’ll be switching over to the new flagship, the San Martín? ... This San Lorenzo is treated as the armada’s flagship for the history recreation, right?”

“That’s why the chancellor is boarding this one and the San Martín is receiving San Lorenzo as a double inherited name. A ship with a double inherited name is rare, but the Musashi has an octuple inherited name of different place names.”

“So that’s how we’re doing it.”

Takakane looked up into the sky and threw the ball. Fusae chased after the white ball and Takakane watched her run.

“You sure are fast. Be my pinch runner next time.”

“Don’t ask that of a girl.”

She caught the ball backhanded, held it up, and let out a breath.

“Taka.”

“What?”

“Testament,” she said. “I wish we could continue like this forever.”

Fusae’s comment brought everyone on the deck to a halt. Her words, however, did not stop.

“I was thinking that I’m close to retirement with my inherited names finishing up. After all, Era Fusae is dead and the Testament descriptions say my double inherited name of Álvaro de Bazán died before the armada battle. That’s why full authority for the armada shifted to Pérez de Guzmán, your double inherited name.”

She threw the ball to Takakane and followed its movements with her head.

“We can avoid the issue by saying ‘the ghost remained’ during the armada battle, but it’ll probably get a lot harder afterwards.”

The ball fell.

“So I’m thinking about retiring and living as a normal ghost. At the same time, I wish it could continue like this.”

And...

“Is that just not going to happen?”

“Fusae.”

Takakane caught the ball extremely close to the ground.

“Stop throwing the ball while facing backwards.”

“Testament. But Taka, you said you could catch any ball.”

“I just wanted to point out your bad form.”

He threw the white ball and she ran after it.

“Ah, that’s a high one.”

“Look up. We don’t have to worry about watching our footing. ...Also, our house has a large yard. It may not be in the sky, but I can still play catch with you at home.”

“But then I can’t show it off to everyone.”

She laughed as she caught the ball and held it up for everyone to see.

“Oh, but some things can be different from normal. Like the chancellor and Ju.”

“Hey, hey,” said Takakane with a frown, but the surrounding students only tilted their heads.

Fusae gave a cruel smile and turned her back to Takakane.

“Is that not going to happen either? The chancellor does seem to have a lot on his mind. But...”

She twisted her body and prepared to use the untwisting motion to perform a shot put-like throw while facing backwards.

“There’s a trick to throwing while facing backwards, Taka.”

“Just make sure it reaches. That only leaves effort on my part. Plus, I’m a genius.”

“I’m not sure that advice was any help or not.”

She threw it and heard him comment.

“That’s a really high one.”

“Can I order something even if the price is a little high?” wondered Gin without even looking at Juana.

They sat at a food cart that served noodles in pork bone broth.

It was already evening, but this was still an early dinner. According to the Testament descriptions, the Oouchi and Ootomo clans that formed Tres España’s Far Eastern foundation had a connection to China and thus a certain amount of Chinese culture had made its way to them. The food cart served Chinese-style noodles that were carved from the noodle batter with a curved knife.

“I will have a large pork bone noodles with stir-fried vegetables and dumplings. Oh, and a spring roll to go. Also, leave out the coriander.”

As Gin gave her order, Juana calculated the cost on a *cadena firma* and lowered her shoulders.

“I will have a mini pork bone noodles.”

“Lady Juana, are you on a diet?”

Juana glared at Gin and Gin nodded.

“But I thought the chancellor liked women like you who can be described with sound effects such as ‘boing’.”

“Th-this has nothing to do with him.”

“Testament.” Gin showed no concern for the other customers giving them odd looks. “I never would have thought you frequented a place like this.”

“Testament. This area is managed by the secretary who was the one the chancellor left me with and the one who made the necessary arrangements for

me.” She gave a small bitter smile. “I think I should try going further out, but I just can’t work up the resolve.”

“You? Not having the necessary resolve? But just the other day you were spreading your legs to seduce the chancellor.”

“I-I did nothing of the sort!”

Gin tilted her head but seemed to come to an understanding.

“My apologies. Testament. You are having trouble with your memory. Have you undergone some kind of shock recently?”

“I revealed my identity to a harsh subordinate.”

The noodles arrived and Gin nodded.

“Everyone is hiding that from the chancellor, aren’t they?”

“The Valdés siblings and the other lower ranked people do not know.”

“What are you going to do?”

“Testament,” answered Juana before beginning to think. “Well, I hope to continue helping until the chancellor retires. I think he will try to recover from Tres España’s decline after the armada battle.”

“Even though he’s so pathetic right now? Are you sure he can do it?”

“He can!”

Her shout filled the street of food carts that had not yet gained the nighttime crowds.

She then realized she had stood up from her seat.

“If you are willing to say that, I take it what you actually mean is that you will make it so he can,” said Gin while eating her noodles. “There is also the fact that

the chancellor is intentionally acting like that for the history recreation of Tres España's debt. But even if that were not the case, he is somehow similar to Master Muneshige, so I doubt there is anything to worry about."

"How are they similar?"

"Testament. It seems to be a trait of powerful people with a solid core, but they both appear to hide their strength. They will act with conviction when the time comes, but they normally look more like an unimportant person who takes it easy."

"So that's how people see him."

"Do you not like it? Do you regret that the person who saved you and led the retreat of Lepanto survivors hides his ability and feigns incompetence?"

"It is not that I regret it. I still know who he really is. But...it is a bit irritating."

"Testament. You want to see the person you love shine in the spotlight. That is a trait of a woman who has been infected with lovesickness."

Gin smiled when she saw Juana unable to hide her blushing.

"From the looks of it, there is no escaping this. Your lovesickness is on the level of the Black Death."

Gin then pointed at the small container in front of Juana.

"Now, after we finish eating, we can discuss the people most important to us. Do not worry. I will treat it as a national secret. And by doing this, I will once more vow to take part in the armada battle."

"Testament. The chancellor will be observing the battle and I will join him, but please do what you can. However..."

"However?" asked Gin.

Juana lowered her head.

“It seems he has used the money I was saving. I think it is related to the social services, but I’m not sure.”

“The husband is using the money his wife has saved up? You are headed directly for a ruined household.”

“I would like to think that won’t happen.” She sighed and further lowered her head. “With the Musashi as our enemy, we have a lot of problems.”

“Lady Juana, the Musashi is a problem, but as a more immediate problem, your bangs are in your soup.”

Juana gave a cry and frantically raised her head.

“So you want to know how to handle our immediate problems? This is just like a novel with how everything always leads to the next turn of events. We run across problem after problem and each solution carries us right to the next one.”

A boy’s voice came from the top of a giant ship awash with the evening sunlight.

Neshinbara was watching the end of the athletic festival from the front deck of Murayama, Musashi’s second port ship. The participants were lined up on the deck and the shirtless host spoke while hiding his face under a black, three-cornered hat.

“Okay! Red Team had seven major injuries, but they win by the narrow margin of two back teeth! And now it’s time for White Team’s war crimes tribunal. Who’s a Class A? You? Hmm, you look more like a Class B. Now, now. No need to cry. It just means you’re a step away from being an adult.”

“Is it just me or does this escalate more and more each year? The number of events has clearly increased.”

Someone listened to Neshinbara give his opinion.

It was Asama.

She too was watching the end of the athletic festival.

“I didn’t really question it when we were in elementary school, but it does seem a bit much now.”

“Even back then, I had my doubts about the ‘Serf Borrowing Race: Courtesy of the Feudal Lord’. Anyway, Asama-kun, sorry about using you as a contact. How is everyone doing?”

“Toori-kun told me to say no one was worried because otherwise you would get conceited. That should give you the gist of how everyone is.”

“Maybe I should release my Macbeth arm and have it harass him.”

“Calm down.” Asama gave a bitter smile and pulled a paper bag from her waist hard point. “This is three days’ worth of bandages. As for the old ones...”

“Judge.” He held out an old paper bag. “Thanks. When I removed it yesterday, my right arm opened a sign frame on its own and almost ordered a depressing porn game to be delivered to the student council room. I seriously shouted ‘B-be still, my right arm! That’s a waste of money!’ If I do anything related to Aoi-kun, Macbeth seems to alter my output. To be honest, I can’t even speak with him. If I did try to talk to him like this, I’d say he was a pathetic person who’s picked his noise and touched girls’ butts since elementary school. ...See! Macbeth is doing it again!”

“I’m not sure that was Macbeth’s doing.”

“Calm down.” This time Neshinbara gave a bitter smile. “Anyway, I hear Balfette-kun and Mitotsudaira-kun are putting together the strategy for the armada battle.”

“You aren’t taking part?”

“Judge. If I helped with the planning, Macbeth might slip something in.”

“And my purification can only restrain it, not eliminate it completely.”

“Judge. A play is a type of festival, so it’s something to be offered to the gods and you can’t eliminate something that isn’t impure. At most, you can delay its starting time. It could be a bad day, for example.”

“Then,” said Asama. “When will you return as secretary?”

“That’s the question.”

Neshinbara lightly tapped just below his left shoulder. His student council armband would normally be there, but he was not wearing it at the moment.

“Shakespeare lectured me. To sum it up, she said I was growing slack.”

“What are you going to do?”

“What am I going to do? She’s on such a higher level than me as an author that, if I was going to do this properly, I’d run away.”

“Then...” Asama brought a hand to her mouth and thought. “If *we* aren’t going to do this properly, *we* won’t run away?”

She pulled an old book from her sleeve and held it out to him.

“Do you remember this? You do, don’t you? This is the book you made when you realized we could use the school’s printing press in elementary school. It’s probably your debut as an ‘author’.”

...Is that...?

Neshinbara remembered it well. He also remembered the excitement and enthusiasm when he had made it.

“Yes.” Asama pushed the bundle of old straw paper further toward him. “The story is extremely straightforward, it includes hidden bloodlines and powers activated by anger, and the author was too embarrassed to go beyond a kiss.”

“Nwohhh!! You don’t have to point it out, Asama-kun! This mental attack is worse than Macbeth!!”

“But Toori-kun told me to say that.”

...Maybe I really should show him what Macbeth is capable of.

He had to calm himself first, but he managed to take the bundle of paper and took a breath.

“Did Aoi-kun give you this?”

“Yes. He’s really good at taking care of things.”

“In other words, he’s got a knack for sniffing out what he can use against someone later on.”

He looked at the cover and remembered that Naruze had made the cover illustration. At the time, the fallen angel had yet to really fit in with the class and she had put some space between herself and Naito.

...But she was always there when I needed an illustration.

The title brought a cold sweat to his brow when he looked at it now.

“Norman Conquest 3. Why was your first book a ‘3’?”

“Y-you really are harsh, Asama-kun! There were two books before it that I never finished! A-and, the ‘m’ to ‘o’ being in bold was Aoi-kun’s doing! It wasn’t me!”^[2]

“I had guessed that much, but I didn’t expect to receive proof.”

“Anyway.” Neshinbara held up the book. “I’ll borrow this. It should help me kill some time. Each page probably has enough to make me hold my head in shame for three days straight.”

“Is that so? I remember we enjoyed it quite a lot back then. Also...”

“Also?”

“There’s something else Toori-kun said.”

She narrowed her eyes.

“ ‘I don’t know what kind of things Shakespeare wrote as a kid, but Neshinbara’s are definitely crazier.’ ”

“ ... ”

When he had expected to be complimented, he had gotten something else.

When he had expected to be called skilled, he had been called something else.

...That’s right.

He had written it in the classroom. To those who remembered that, that was likely how they would view it.

Shakespeare had probably been the same. During class, she would have taken notes and done actual writing on sign frames or paper and she would have grown proud as the surrounding people asked her how she could do it.

That was a path anyone who could write had to walk down.

However...

...That’s right.

There were two kinds of people in the world: those who could write and those who could not. At the very least, that was how the world was divided for those who wished to become authors. And once the surrounding people told them which side they belonged to, their hesitation could change to a sense of superiority and arrogance.

“How about it?” asked Asama. “Did you make your first...your first author friend, Neshinbara-kun?”

Neshinbara thought about that question.

“But it looked like she hated me.”

“What’s wrong with that?” Asama pointed toward the book in his hand. “How about you show her this and say, ‘Look! Amazing, isn’t it?’ ”

“Does that come from Aoi-kun too?”

“No. His wording was much worse, so I cleaned it up a bit.”

“Judge.” He held up the book again. “Tell him I’m borrowing this, but I’ll eventually return it. After all, I have a good way to kill some time now. There was a time when I was elated by my debut as an author and now I’m all worn out.”

He gave a true smile for the first time in a while.

“But I don’t feel like denying the idiot I used to be, so I guess I’m still just as hopeless.”

Chapter 50: Left Out in a Place of Gathering

CHAPTER 50

"Left Out in a Place of Gathering"



Your intention
Is to give your all for them
But you are actually relying on them
Point Allocation (Self-Confirmation)

Your intention

Is to give your all for them

But you are actually relying on them

Point Allocation (Self-Confirmation)

The days until the armada battle passed while the participating nations prepared.

England used the festival to gather materiel and deploy troops to the coastal regions.

Tres España performed joint training for suppressing the English fleet while primarily training the Grande y Felicísima Armada.

Musashi was quickly arming its ships, training those in charge of the armaments, and working with “Musashi” to take a second look at its cruising system.

“Musashi” suddenly stated one piece of good news to Sakai.

“I have completed the analysis of the sound produced by the flight of the low-speed cannon shell that damaged the Musashi. Praise me. Over.”

“Oh, how manly, ‘Musashi’-san. Are you in a good mood today?”

The sound that had been extracted via process of elimination from “Musashi” and the other automatons’ massive memory was highly accurate, but they did not know what any alterations or the initial firing of the shell sounded like.

As such, they could not detect anything until the shell had already been fired, but the Musashi’s gravity barriers could be instantly deployed if it was detected at close range. Overall, it was being viewed positively.

“Musashi’s” analysis had revealed two things.

First, Tres España's stealth technology was primary stealth which cut off sound, light, and ether reactions. To locate the ship after the cannon was fired, Musashi had put together a specialized detection team. Modifications to Asakusa and Shinagawa were complete, but they were being kept under individual stealth to allow the detection team to train.

Also, they had been able to predict the size of the ship that possessed the low-speed cannon and the stealth system. It was apparently a Jormungandr Class at around 800 meters long, which put it at roughly the same size as K.P.A. Italia's Regno Unito. The details on the San Martín, Tres España's flagship in the Testament descriptions, were not yet known, so they predicted the ship in question was the San Martín.

After gathering all that information, Mitotsudaira and Adele worked to put together a strategy.

"For some reason, I feel like I'm only coming up with defensive ideas and you're only coming up with offensive ones, Adele."

"Do we subconsciously know what it is we lack?"

For that reason, the planning headquarters became unofficially known as the "Lacking Headquarters". They simplified and standardized the chain of command and form of instructions in the early stages to have a groundwork to handle the increased numbers of instructions that were sure to come later.

At the same time, some volunteers were gathered who would satisfy the 'desire for self-destruction' found in the Living Dead of England. A system was created to judge the aptitude of those volunteers.

However, that aptitude test was not meant to eliminate the inadequate people.

"From the beginning, they will be given a role as an attacker or defender and they will be divided into individual units," explained Mitotsudaira. "That way, we can use everyone without any waste and we can ensure the quickest action with the fewest instructions. This is the method of a national army like the one Hexagone Française is beginning to develop."

Throughout the day, she would help with trade or hold chain of command training. During the night, she would hold combat training with Naomasa and eat yakiniku. Despite the full schedule, everyone stuck with her. They all gathered for yakiniku in the name of a strategy meeting, the female teachers joined them, they fought over the food, and they ultimately caused the supplier to fear the acts of mankind. At the morning assembly the next day, Shirojiro and Heidi lectured them all.

Meanwhile on the political front, Masazumi and the queen held a few meetings together.

They discussed the mercenary contract with Musashi as well as some other things.

“England will promise the following things after our victory in the armada battle:

“First, England will return the Logismoi Oplo until after the Peace of Westphalia.

“Second, until that Peace, England will not ally with another nation for the purposes of attacking the Musashi.

“That should become the standard for other nations as well, so what do you think?”

That would require Musashi to provide support for other nations on the level of the armada battle when receiving their Logismoi Oplo, but Masazumi smiled and agreed. She then spoke to the queen who seemed doubtful.

“During the armada battle, Shakespeare will use England’s Logismoi Oplo to protect England, after all. And once the battle is over, we can negotiate some more.”

Musashi was giving a concession, but she had a few ideas of her own such as connecting the two nations’ divine transmission lines because the Musashi would be part of England during the battle.

Time passed as many others took a variety of actions, prepared, and trained.

While a large crowd was gathered for the closing ceremony held at the end of the morning on the final day of the festival, word arrived that Tres España's Grande y Felicísima Armada had left port with no sign of its flagship.

The festival was hurriedly cleaned up and most of England's major players had already left by the previous day, so the city felt quite empty as the day passed and evening arrived. To avoid giving away where to attack, a blackout was in place, but something large could still be seen moving.

It was the Musashi.

After the normal Musashi citizens were sent to IZUMO under escort from Hawkins and Cavendish, the Musashi shook England as it activated to leave port as England's flagship.

However, a certain commotion occurred within the Musashi. Before continuing to their individual posts, everyone had gathered on the bridge in front of Musashi Ariadust Academy and a dependent sounding voice shouted out.

“Wh-what do you mean, Margot!?”

It was Naruze and she was currently trying to grab at Naito's collar.

“Why can't I join the battle as a part of Musashi's Technohexen unit!? Is it because I'm useless!?”

When she heard she was not authorized to join in the battle, Naruze felt a weight pressing down in the bottom of her heart. It was a cold weight and it threatened to make her tremble if she let her guard down even slightly, so she spoke to eliminate it.

“Why!? Tell me! Is it because I haven't trained enough!?”

Her heart grew icily cold, but her mind was filled with heat. She wanted an answer and she did not understand if her question was wrong, if she had not asked enough, or what.

“If it’s my wings, I-look! I can move them properly now and I can fly! Margot, you were the one that healed me, weren’t you!? So why are you telling me to stay inside!?”

She saw Margot smile with the ends of her eyebrows lowered.

“No, um... Ga-chan?”

She knew what Margot was going to say. It was the same thing she had said before.

“You’re saying that isn’t it, right!? But if that’s all you say, how am I supposed to understand!?”

Tears started welling up in the corners of her eyes, but she did not care. She took a breath and a step forward, but Margot stepped back. She did not want the other girl to run away, so Naruze took another half step forward.

“Is it because I’m weak!? Is it because I’m useless without Weiss Fräulein!? Is it because I’m just a burden on you!? Is it because I always lose and people insult me on the divine network, so you don’t want me to drag your reputation down!? Or...”

She trembled.

“Is it because my father...”

As she spoke, Naruze saw Margot’s expression change.

Her smile vanished and her eyes opened wide. Her eyebrows rose a little and she seemed to want to say something.

However, that expression gave Naruze an internal smile.

...Good. I got a different reaction.

But...

“Naruze.”

It was Asama who spoke up and Naruze and Margot reacted at the same time.

“_____”

They held their breath and something happened to the joy rising inside Naruze.

...Crap.

She belatedly realized that she had begun to say something terrible. A hole opened inside her joy, that hole filled with regret, and it all chilled the depths of her being even further.

But, she thought. Without even realizing it, I've become completely hopeless.

She had lost Weiss Fräulein, she was a burden on Margot at work, she had been useless and lost during the attack on the Musashi, and she had disgraced them by letting Tres España save her during her duel with one of England's representatives.

By the time she had woken, the Musashi had been about to leave for the armada battle.

...But she says I should just rest.

It was true that she had not accomplished anything and would only trip people up on the battlefield.

But...

“Do you not need me anymore?”

Had the battlefield developed to the point that she could not handle it? Was she now useless and only a source of worry despite her previous relationships?

“Are you saying...this is for both our sakes?”

“No, Ga-chan. Um...”

“That isn’t it, right? But... That isn’t it!”

As soon as she shouted out, Asama’s presence arrived from the right using the gap created when she took a breath. Naruze’s shoulders trembled and she took a half step away. She turned toward Asama and found her motionless with the ends of her eyebrows lowered, but Naruze could not grasp the meaning of that expression.

Her only thought was that Asama would advise she back down and that thought brought on another thought.

...If she does that, it will mean leaving Margot.

Margot would leave. In some unknown place, she would interact with some unknown people and on a deeper level than with her. That was likely a good thing for Margot, but...

“I don’t want that.”

After all...

“How much... How much do you think I’ve done to spend my time with you?”

So if the alternative was to be called useless...

“I don’t mind. Even if I have to act as your shield and die, I don’t mind as long as it will keep you alive.”

...Do you understand? Would anyone else go that far?

“I’ll do anything. Even if it means being beaten to a pulp or killed, it would be for you.”

As soon as she said that, something struck her left shoulder.

She felt careless for focusing so much on Asama to her right, so her caution and reflexes mixed together.

“Eh?”

She turned around and found brown hair dancing through the air.

It was Kimi. The girl twisted her body and then untwisted it.

“Yoooooooouuuuuuu coward!!”

A slap accompanied by a tornado sent Naruze flying.

Asama reacted to both Kimi’s action and the sound she heard.

...*Wow.*

She gave a stiff mental comment and looked up at Naruze flying through the sky.

...*Do big breasts increase the power of tornado strikes? Oh, but that probably won’t help with my bow and arrow, so I guess I lost out there.*

As she thought, Kimi grabbed Naruze’s collar and forced her to her feet. Naruze seemed unable to react, but that was likely more due to the surprise of the strike than any pain it caused.

“You aren’t my brother or my sister.”

Kimi brought her hand back to slap the other cheek. With a clear sound, Naruze began to collapse to her knees, but Kimi would not allow it. She gathered strength in her hips and lifted her back up.

“So I’ll leave it at this.”

She pinched both cheeks and pulled.

“Hyah!” said Naruze. “Ouhhhhhhh!!”

“Ouch” became “ouh” because she could not close her mouth. Kimi partially closed her eyes to glare at Naruze’s face while pulling her cheeks even farther to either side.

Despite Kimi’s gaze, which was better described as deep than sharp, Naruze was undaunted.

“Wh-wha ih it?”

As soon as Naruze wrinkled her brow and spoke, Kimi brought her face to Naruze’s.

Before everyone could give noises of surprise, Kimi opened her lips a bit and lightly bit Naruze’s upper lip. There was a clear sound of tearing flesh and Naruze’s six wings bristled and rose.

Kimi then released Naruze’s shoulders.

“ ... ”

Naruze fell and sat on the floor. The small amount of blood from her upper lip flowed into her mouth.

“They say drinking some warm milk can calm you down, don’t they, Asama?”

“How about you ask yourself instead of me?”

However, she understood what Kimi was trying to say, so she answered.

“Milk has similar properties to blood, so warming it up and drinking it can remind you what is flowing through your own body.”

“Oh? I was trying to say it represents a mother’s milk, so why are you giving the safer answer to protect yourself, Asama? We aren’t talking about cows! We’re talking about people! It’s philosophy!”

“What? You’re blaming me for ruining this!? Doesn’t the blame lie with the one who appointed me as director!?”

Everyone told her to calm down, so she and Kimi gestured for them to quiet down. On top of that, she looked at Kimi who stood in front of Naruze.

Kimi was looking at Naruze as the girl sat limply on the floor. She did not look down on her, but she did not lower herself to Naruze’s level either. The lightly crossed arms and the smile on the corner of her mouth were just her normal behavior.

...She only matches the height of her gaze when speaking with Toori-kun.

Asama wondered if she did with Horizon as well and decided to pay more attention next time.

Kimi then spoke to Naruze.

“Listen. I understand you’re on a losing streak and you’re getting desperate, but the battlefield isn’t a place to clear your name. Right now, you’re underqualified for the job.”

“Kimi! Kimi! You’re using some of those phrases in a wonderfully wrong way!”

“You’re being a bit confusing yourself,” cut in the others, but Asama ignored them.

Kimi danced to avoid answering Asama, so they were no different.

“At any rate,” said Kimi. “What was it you told Naito just now?”

Naruze reacted with silent eyes that looked both expressionless and hostile, but Kimi only raised the corner of her mouth.

...Naruze knows she can't do anything.

Naruze was glaring at Kimi because nothing she did or said would change this, so she had no other choice. There was no reason to respond to the glare and no reason for Kimi to alter her own pace.

“Listen. You told her, ‘I’ll do anything. Even if it means being beaten to a pulp or killed, it would be for you.’ ”

Calm down.

“After all, that means if you died or were beaten to a pulp, *it would happen because Naito was there.*”

Naruze had not intended to listen.

An unpleasant girl stood before her. She had to admit she had known the girl for a long time, but she had little desire to be actively involved with her in any way. She could only get along with that girl by keeping her distance.

That was why she had simply thought she had to keep her distance from what that girl said.

No matter what the girl said to her or did to her, it would not change that she had been deemed unfit to remain in the place she wanted to be.

Of course, it would solve everything if she no longer wanted to be there.

...But that isn't possible.

The fact that she could not accept this was her own fault.

But that was why she had no intention of giving in. No matter what was said, she had decided not to abandon her defiance. After all, abandoning that would be resigning herself to the goodness of the others.

However, she heard Kimi speak.

“Listen. You say you’re willing to be beaten to a pulp or killed for Naito’s sake. But then if you do die or are beaten to a pulp, it means your death or injuries happened *because Naito was there*. If Naito had not been there, you wouldn’t have been hurt or killed. And what would you say to her then?”

The unpleasant girl stopped smiling as she spoke.

“ ‘Margot, I may have been hurt and killed, but *it was for you*.’ ‘I died for you, so rejoice.’ ‘But I was only beaten and killed because you were there, so remember for the rest of your life what it meant for that to happen to me.’ ”

She took a breath.

“Another thing, Naruze. Did Naito ever ask for your help? You aren’t helping someone who asked for it, so when you say you are saving her or helping her ‘for her sake’, you are being terribly insulting. It means you view her as someone who is lacking without your help. It is either one-sided charity or something you are forcing on her. You are simply trying to gain a temporary sense of superiority over the people who have the bare minimum of pride in being able to survive on their own. They are doing their best to survive, but you take that from them with an insulting sense of superiority and yet you pass it off as kindness.”

So...

“If you are going to do it, say it’s for your own sake. Or perhaps because you can’t forgive yourself for being unable to save anyone. Forcing that on someone may be hypocritical, but at the very least, don’t expect any thanks for it. On that note, what were you thinking?”

“What?”

“You were expecting the greatest reward of all. You wanted her to keep you by her side because you were doing it for her.”

The girl did not even give a bitter smile. She simply spoke in an indifferent tone.

“Do you think you can be with someone just because you devote yourself to them? That’s an insult to love.”

“Stop!!”

Naruze was not sure if her shout was directed at the unpleasant girl or herself.

...*But*...

If she was going to give a shout of rejection, what had she been doing up until now?

Naruze thought in a daze.

What had she been thinking and doing?

She had given a rejection to Kimi and herself, so she felt as if she had completely eliminated her feelings for Naito and the defiance supporting her.

“Why...?”

After far too long, she began to tremble and tears filled the corners of her eyes.

She tasted blood and wondered if she was sensing that strong iron flavor because her tension was vanishing. However, that hinted at what was happening inside her.

“Everything is going away,” she muttered.

She tried to cover her face with her hands, but a sudden voice from behind stopped her.

“Sis! Sis! Can I ask a question here!?”

“Heh heh heh. Foolish brother, do you have something to ask for your wise sister’s Indiscriminate Lecturing and Bombing Corner? What is it?”

“Well,” answered the idiot. “Is it wrong to do something for someone’s sake? Is it really that terrible?”

“What’s this? Foolish brother, do you want a serious discussion?”

“Hmm.” Toori tilted his head and raised his right hand. “For example, when I’m playing porn games, I always have an ulterior motive when I’m working to win the girls.”

“But when you fail to win them, it’s because of that ulterior motive, right? Just make sure you save regularly.”

“Oh, that’s right! So my question was the true end! I guess that settles everything!”

“Don’t end this yet!”

Asama thought a bit about what Toori had asked and then huddled together with the others.

“I ended up chaotic, but Toori-kun actually asked a surprisingly decent question.”

The others nodded and turned toward Kimi as she shrugged.

“Well, when you aren’t asked to do something, you’re generally doing it for your own sake. It’s wonderfully egotistical, but human history has prepared something convenient for the ego beginners who find that too difficult.”

Asama caught on because it was something often prayed for at the Asama Shrine.

It was something human history had created that one could channel their ego into.

“Eros!! Heil eros! What a wonderful fusion with German! A hail of eros! It’s raining eros! Everything is for the sake of eros! Well done, mankind!! Let it wash over you!!”

“N-no! You’re supposed to say love or peace or something like that!”

“C’mon, Asama. Who would give a serious answer here?”

“Asama, you really can be boring sometimes.”

...I’m at fault here!? And does that mean I’m usually interesting!? Why!?

She had a lot of questions, but she felt responsible here and thus needed to correct this. She was embarrassed to speak again after that, but she did so while blushing.

“U-um... Basically, i-if you do it for l-love or...”

“Right, right.”

The two siblings nodded in unison.

“Asama-san, I can’t hear, so speak uuuup.”

She prepared her bow and the two ran away. She used that chance to take a breath and speak.

“So, um. Those things don’t have misunderstandings or their own thoughts like a person does. They’re formless and they have no responsibility or rewards. They’re also important to people, so I think it’s safe to use them as a driving force.”

Asama was proud of how well she had rattled off something that sounded straight out of the shrine’s collection of example sermons, but then she heard the others whispering.

“Are we being deceived here?”

“It is true that shrine maidens have persuasion spells.”

“And wasn’t this about me? Why is everything progressing so much without me?”

The comments annoyed Asama, but Naruze actually had a point.

She looked down and saw Naruze sitting on the ground with drooping shoulders. However, that was not due to dejection. She exhaled as if to let out everything that had built up inside her.

“Margot.”

“What is it, Ga-chan?”

“It would be a problem to hold almost religious faith in a Technohexen, wouldn’t it?”

Naito momentarily looked to the others. The others exchanged a glance with her and for some reason Kimi gave a gesture of sticking something out from either side of her chest, but that was the behavior of a crazy person and could be ignored.

Naito merely nodded in response.

“I’m not sure I would call it a problem, but I might blush.”

“I can’t have you blushing because of my misunderstanding. I need you to answer who I truly am.”

So...

“Do you need my help?”

Naito shook her head.

“No, not as you are right now, Ga-chan.”

...That’s right.

Naruze lowered her head with the flavor of blood on her tongue and she felt that was not a bad answer.

“Judge. That’s right. I want you to give me what I want, but then we wouldn’t be equal and it would all be over.”

“Judge. I’m always the same way. After all...”

Naito sat down next to her as she spoke. It felt like forever since they had looked each in the eye from the same height, but that was likely because Naruze had been keeping everything so one sided.

But Naito did not abandon, slap, or bite the lip of her partner. She only gave a calming smile and similarly calming words.

“We are the Zwei Fräulein because we stand side by side, not because we help each other. And you know the Far Eastern characters used to write the name, don’t you?”

She did.

“U-um, there are two crotches and then women surrendering to them... Um, it’s a metaphor! Only a metaphor!!”

“Ga-chan, I think you’re getting back to your usual self pretty quickly.”

“What’s wrong with that?” asked Naruze. “And will we always stand side by side, no matter where we go or what we do?”

“Didn’t we become Zwei Fräulein in order to make that happen?”

“Did we?”

It could be a problem just how positively and conveniently Naito tended to view things.

However, there was important meaning in going along with it now.

...If she's handling it like this, it means she's trying to remain with me.

So Naruze decided to trust her without abandoning the dissatisfied part of her own character.

“Then...I'll put my faith in that. A Technohexen has faith in her nickname, right? That has to be the best option for me.”

She took a breath, held up her right hand, and spoke to Kimi who smiled down at her.

“I'm too unsteady to stand thanks to a certain idiot hitting me, so can you help me up?”

As Naruze stood and everyone breathed a sigh of relief, the school's front entrance opened and someone stepped out.

“Huh?”

Everyone turned toward the person.

“Oriotorai-sensei, what do you need? If it is alcohol money, I can provide some on certain conditions.”

“Shirojiro, I'm afraid of any conditions you might give. But that's not it. Um...is Tenzou here?”

Everyone exchanged a glance and Toori spoke up.

“Everyone! Everyone! How cruel can you be!? Just because Tenzou's plain is no reason to not notice he's missing!”

Everyone glared at the idiot until he curled up on the ground in a corner of the bridge.

“Good, good,” commented Oriotorai as she held an envelope up for everyone to see.

It had already been opened and she showed them the letter inside.

“This arrived in the faculty room from Tenzou, so take a look.”

To Whom It May Concern,

How are you enjoying your time in this world?

The Apocalypse is approaching, but I have recently been living a plain...a fulfilling covert life as a ninja.

Today, I must ask permission to drop out of the academy for personal reasons.

As I do not wish to cause any trouble for all of you horrible people, I must ask this one thing.

Also, the Black Death still remains in this time period, so keep an eye on your health.

Sincerely,

Tenzou Crossunite

Everyone lined up next to each other and spent a few seconds reading the letter.

“Doesn’t that old-fashioned way of speaking get really annoying?”

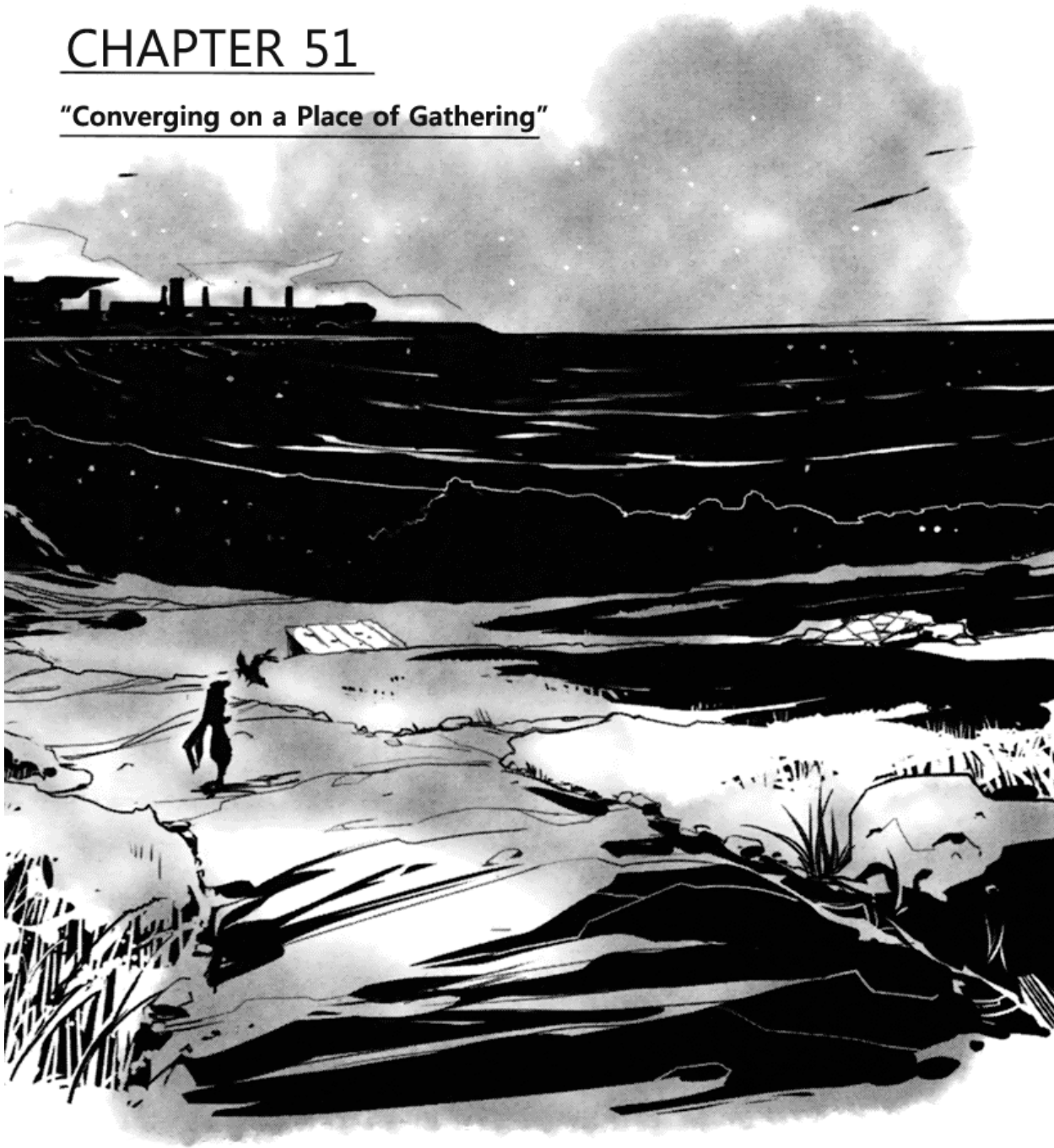
“He could’ve just rewritten that third line. Does it bother him that much?”

“Calm down, calm down.” Oriotorai closed the letter and looked across her students. “Listen. Do something about this before we leave port. (Point Allocation: Wasting Friendship)”

Chapter 51: Converging on a Place of Gathering

CHAPTER 51

"Converging on a Place of Gathering"



Your intention
Is to do everything for another
But you are actually following your own desires
Point Allocation (Mutual Agreement)

Your intention

Is to do everything for another

But you are actually following your own desires

Point Allocation (Mutual Agreement)

The night sky was overhead and the dirt ground was underfoot. That ground formed a hill leading up to a wheat field.

Wind washed over the hill which gave a view of a giant ship floating alongside the land and the cloud of mist it produced.

The sounds of the giant ship starting up travelled through the sky to reach the hill. It sounded like a rumbling or a continuous wind and two people listened to it from atop the dark hill.

One was a boy wearing a black Far Eastern uniform that had been altered into a ninja outfit and the other was a three-legged crow.

The crow wore an English uniform.

“Look, Tenzou. The seeds you planted are growing. I, Milton, have an urge to peck at the buds! The buds!!”

“Little myna-dono, those are some excellent instincts you have. But even if it is the European style to not tend to them, isn’t the village down below a little too quiet?”

“There is a battle approaching and they are in mourning.”

After all...

“It is for the three hundred who Scarred...who Lady Mary executed in the history recreation. Their families naturally lost their social status for being the family of

the executed. Of course, the Fairy Queen restored their positions, but everyone here is sick of the history recreation.”

“Then Mary-dono...”

“When she first came here, it seems she was shunned a fair bit. Her history recreation had already entered the early stages of the execution. That gave her some freedom, but it seems she came here despite those shackles and it seems she managed to fit in, bit by bit.”

“Little myna-dono, you are saying that ‘it seems’ things a lot, so did you not arrive until later?”

“Testament.” Milton nodded. “I, Milton, was originally a Far Eastern resident.”

“I see.”

Tenzou also nodded and Milton eventually turned toward him.

“You aren’t surprised?”

“W-wow! I’m incredibly surprised! I see, I see. So you come from the Far East!”

“You are not surprised enough. I will say nothing more.”

“Why...why did you suddenly get so blunt!? Please tell me more!”

“Well, if you insist.”

Tenzou clenched his right fist behind his back until it trembled, but he already knew most of it.

“Just like Sir Walter of the Trumps, you are a remnant of the Amako clan, aren’t you?”

“Testament. There are three survivors of the Amako Ten Braves: Yamanaka Yukimori, Yokomichi Hyougonosuke, and Akiage Hisaie. I am Yokomichi Hyougonosuke. I was originally a Yatagarasu living in Izumo, but the master of

the clan was willing to play around with me. However, P.A. Oda prevented the clan from recovering, just as the Testament descriptions said, so I was ultimately forced to flee to England.”

“And then to Mary-dono?”

“Our ship was pursued and it crashed. Yamanaka has...difficulty riding in ships, so that was not fun for anyone involved. Anyway, Scarred saved us and we are in her debt, but Yamanaka...”

The crow lowered and shook his head as if he did not want to accept it.

“He took the Fairy Queen’s side.”

“That is a difference in what master you decided you should serve.”

...Walter probably still feels that debt to Mary.

However, he had probably seen the qualities of one he should serve in the Fairy Queen who ruled and protected England. Meanwhile, Milton was trying to have Walter’s loyalty return to the debt they held.

Then what about Tenzou himself?

“What will you do, boy? It is near impossible to break through everything up ahead and reach Lady Mary.”

“That is fine. This is an act of selfishness on my part.”

He had realized how Mary felt about him. Unless he was imagining it, her will had made it through to him.

...But it was still me that decided to do this.

If possible, he did not want her to hear about it if he met some pathetic end.

...Oh, but I’m so plain that there’s nothing to worry about there. She’s probably already forgotten about me.

“Your mood seems to be growing darker and darker.”

“J-judge. M-my thoughts have a tendency to slip in the negative direction!”

With all his failures when it came to girls, that was hardly surprising.

However, he was giving this his all. His classmates would likely view him as irresponsible by doing something so reckless while completely ignoring their mission to retrieve the Logismo Oplo.

But if he cast aside the meaning of that scar on his back, he would regret it. And that regret would stay with him for the rest of his life. After all, she would vanish and never come back.

...So Toori-dono might understand.

With that thought, he made one last check of the map. He had memorized the route. There were a few difficult points and they were all completely reckless for someone like him. He suspected he would need a hundred of him to make it to the end. He also suspected even that was overestimating his ability.

He groaned and a hand reached in from the side to point at a spot on the map.

“Oh, We said to buy some tea at the store here. He says it’s pretty good.”

“I see. But I doubt they are still open this late, Toori-dono.”

When he looked to the side and saw a naked boy there, he and Milton cried out in unison.

“Waaaah!!”

Tenzou frantically turned around.

There, he found a few familiar faces with Toori and Horizon as their representatives.

“What’s your important announcement, Tenzou? Don’t go running off without telling us.”

He had forgotten about that.

“I...”

He bowed and made his announcement to the others.

“I am on my way to confess to a girl?”

It came out as a question because it did not feel real even to him, but he said what he had to say.

“And?” asked everyone else with serious expressions.

“Eh? A-and what?”

He grew hesitant, so the others formed a scrum in the darkness.

“Is that idiot copying me?”

“As a Weiss Hexen, I don’t think it counts as an important announcement if it’s something you’ve already failed at countless times.”

“To me, it looks like he has gone insane from fear,” added Urquiaga.

...Th-these people really like to take shots at people!!

But there was something he had to ask.

“B-but why are you all here!? ...Ah! Don’t tell me this is some cruel plan to watch on and then laugh when I fail!”

“Hey, everyone. This plain ninja has a persecution complex now. Have we ever been the type to rub salt in the wound of someone who lost!? And even if we are, do really think we’d be aware of it!?”

“Y-you people are the worst!”

“Listen,” said Toori while patting Horizon on the shoulder. “Can you tell us one thing? Why are you on your way to save Mary? Isn’t that part of the history recreation and something she wants?”

He took a breath.

“To be blunt, even if something pushed you in this direction, couldn’t it just be your imagination?”

...That’s true.

Tenzou thought about his days with her as Scarred, their conversations, the contact between their skin, and the kiss scene during the festival date on their last day together.

“Hey, hey, hey, hey. You sure you aren’t glorifying your own pointless past!?”

“It isn’t pointless! It isn’t!!”

However, there was one thing that was not subject to that glorification: his scar.

“I received a scar from her, so...” He thought before continuing. “I need to ask her if she will give me a scar that runs even deeper.”

“Oh.” Toori smiled and lowered the ends of his eyebrows. “So you’re seriously going to confess, huh?”

“Judge. You could say...”

He clenched his fist and chose to use the English word.

“I’ve fallen in love!”

“Oh!! You’ve fallen in love!?”

Toori clenched his own fist and gave a shout of his own.

“Then there’s no helping it! Hey, Horizon. Ask Tenzou your question.”

“Judge.”

The white-haired automaton turned her expressionless face toward him and tilted her head.

“This will be a repeat question, but why are you going to save Mary-sama?”

It was true he had been asked that question several times already and had asked it to himself even more times.

However, the scar on his back was all the answer he needed. If he was right about its meaning...

“I plan to steal Mary-dono from England.”

“Steal her? Even though she does not wish for it and she does wish for death?”

Tenzou nodded to the repeated question.

“If I lost Mary-dono, I would be sad.”

That was all there was to it. It did not matter what anyone else – even Mary – thought.

“I do not want to be sad. ...It is often said that a ninja must suppress his own emotions because the word ninja is written with the heart hidden beneath a blade. But...”

But...

“The character for heart has not been removed from the word for ninja.”

“Then,” began Horizon. “Would someone have been sad if I had been lost when it was me?”

It was not just Tenzou who answered her question. Everyone there did.

“Judge!”

The many overlapping voices repeating the word “judge” told him he had not made a mistake.

“In that case,” said Horizon after some hesitation. “Would I become sad again if Mary-sama were lost?”

Everyone turned toward Tenzou to ask him if that were the case.

However, he knew the answer.

“Judge. Even if you do not know her now, you will eventually learn what kind of person she was. And then I am sure you will feel it was a regrettable loss and you will wish you had spoken with her.”

“Then...”

Then?

“Will I be able to do that if you save Mary-sama?”

She spoke as if asking for confirmation.

“And if I choose to save all people who will similarly be lost in the future, will I be able to avoid feeling the emotion of sadness?”

...What an absurd thing to say!

Horizon herself likely did not realize it, but she was saying something ridiculous.

After all, the idiot had announced he would conquer the world and now his partner was saying she would save the world.

...And all because she doesn't want to feel sad!

Suddenly, Horizon nodded and lowered her head toward Tenzou.

“I apologize, Tenzou-sama. I was able to bring that question to a level at which I could make a decision on it myself, so I produced my own answer. That being...”

That being...

“Toori-sama, if you will gather the Logismoi Oplo, conquer the world to end the Apocalypse, and make me happy by giving me negative emotions, then I will say this from a parallel position.”

She took a breath.

“We are parallel. I have determined I will save the world from the greatest loss that is the Apocalypse and make myself happy by never using the negative emotions I gain.”

Within the group that had gone after Tenzou, Masazumi heard Horizon speak to her.

“Masazumi-sama, my decision has come out quite nicely, so I have instructions for you. Please make an announcement to England that a group opposed to being mercenaries has broken off from Musashi’s mercenary unit and is on its way to take Mary Stuart from them.”

“Judge. Since we’re considered at war with any nation possessing a Logismoi Oplo, we don’t have to worry about our right to declare war. Also, rescuing Mary will justify the actions we took when rescuing Horizon. But this means the rest of you need to be prepared for a second round against England.”

Masazumi pulled her handheld shrine from her pocket binder. Mitotsudaira glanced over to offer the use of her sign frame, but Masazumi wanted to preserve Blessings with the coming battle. She manually dialed the address and made a voice call.

“It’s me,” came the response after a short pause.

“Hello, is this the Fairy Queen’s residence? It looks like we’re going to war with England after all. Um, I’m recording this conversation, so it’s official. Will thirty minutes from now work for you? It’ll be another set of battles between our representatives like before.”

“Eh? What? W-wait a minute! This is a little sudden!”

“You attacked us without warning last time, so you’ll accept this without running, won’t you?”

She heard a gasp from the other end, but she did not care.

“Okay, we’ll gather at the site and then each representative will go wherever they want after that. Is this getting through?”

“You fool!!”

The connection was cut off from the other side and Masazumi dropped the handheld shrine into her pocket binder.

“Is that good, Horizon?”

“Judge. I have determined that was excellent. I can relax a bit now. At the very least, I have ensured that I am not merely sitting idly by as I grow sad.”

However, the others gave Masazumi uncertain looks.

“A-are you sure you should’ve done that?”

“I did record it, so we can make it official. Or we can choose not to. At any rate, we have a good policy for Musashi now. Our visit to England had real meaning. After all, our king and princess have fully decided on their own policies. All that’s left is your challenge, Tenzou. If you can stay true to yourself, so can Musashi. We will be able to stay true to ourselves even when facing other nations in the future.”

So...

“Go for it, Tenzou.”

Tenzou nodded.

He felt it might be hopeless. No, it was probably hopeless. In fact, it was hopeless. It was far too hopeless.

A ninja had no direct combat ability, so it would likely come to an end at some point.

...*But*...

He wanted to do enough to say to the others that he had done what he could. He wanted to give enough of an effort to suppress the sadness of Musashi's princess as much as he could.

“Then...”

Just as he was going to announce his departure, the color silver appeared in front of him.

“Wait a moment, Tenzou. I will be going with you.”

“Eh?”

“You don't get it?” Mitotsudaira pointed at the Musashi's silhouette floating in the sky behind her. “The Musashi is currently acting as a mercenary ship, but it would be shameful for a knight to lower herself to the level of a mercenary.”

“But what about Adele-dono?”

“She can't exactly move much,” said everyone else while hanging their heads.

Amid them all, Mitotsudaira cleared her throat.

“Well, Adele does not have an inherited name, so she can be more carefree about that sort of thing. I will have her be a mercenary for now and I will take over for her later.”

“Take over for her? You mean you plan to join the armada battle after fighting England?”

“The armada battle will circle England, so it will remain within reach. It’s the natural choice, isn’t it? I was originally planning to spend this free time in the transport ship.”

The wolf smiled while holding up her two remaining silver chains.

“But if we’re fighting their representatives, I can go give my thanks to their hound.”

“In that case, I need to go as well. The man-eating wolf is out monitoring the armada battle, so maybe that skinny woman will be my opponent.”

The black-winged Technohexen stepped forward. She wore her uniform because she lacked Weiss Fräulein.

...Why are her cheeks swollen?

As Tenzou wondered that, Urquiaga stepped forward.

“As a Catholic, I cannot oppose Tres España. And Tenzou, make sure you come back alive. I’ll donate you a dozen porn games I have already tested for Toori.”

“Th-that’s the worst death flag I’ve ever heard!”

“Calm down,” said the group filling the area.

Among them, Masazumi smiled bitterly and spoke.

“It would be best for me to stay here to oversee everything. It would be a problem if we had no one to declare the end of hostilities. I’ll be hiding in the transport ship, so don’t expect me to fight. Also...”

“I’ll go,” said a voice they had not heard for a while.

“Neshinbara-dono!”

“That’s right.” Neshinbara nodded. “According to Asama-kun, England’s third level and up are already contained inside a permeable barrier version of the theatre space. Instead of preparing stages in an alternate space like before, England itself has been turned into the stage. If England is attacked, it will be fully protected using the power of the theatre performance.”

And that meant...

“Shakespeare is here with the Logismo Oplo. I will fight her and take it back.”

No one asked whether he could nor not.

...In that case, whoever makes the biggest announcement wins.

Everyone nodded silently, so he returned the nod.

“Ariadust-kun, Aoi-kun. I’ve caused a lot of trouble for you with my absence, so I promise that I will greet you with Shakespeare’s Logismo Oplo in hand.”

“Sure,” responded Toori before asking a question. “Did you read your old masterpiece?”

“I did.”

Neshinbara clenched his teeth in a smile. This had nothing to do with the king. It was all about himself, so he spoke without worry.

“I’ve always been a genius. I’d just forgotten because of all the strange people surrounding me.”

Everyone laughed and the crowd faced Neshinbara and bowed.

“Please rescue Lady Mary, children.”

“Judge,” replied everyone.

...Milton, hm?

Milton was an English poet and author. He would be best known for writing *Paradise Lost* and that reminded Neshinbara of something mentioned in the Testament descriptions.

...Milton's wife was named Mary, wasn't she?

Why had he chosen Milton as his inherited name?

...Was it to root for a rival while knowing his own feelings would never be returned?

Had Tenzou realized that?

At the moment, Tenzou simply looked into the sky over London.

Everyone understood he was going and they divided between those going with him, those waiting, and those returning.

At the lead of those going, Tenzou spoke.

“Milton-dono. There is something I would like to ask of you.”

Everyone wondered what it could be and the crow tilted his head just like the rest of them.

“Listen up. You too, everyone. Will you all listen to my own way of rescuing Mary-dono?”

That question gave Neshinbara a certain thought.

...If you have to ask, it probably isn't going to be anything good.

It was 5:30 PM. Darkness already filled the southern end of England as a giant silhouette left port and travelled west.

It left slowly, but it suddenly accelerated westward.

The Musashi had used its gravitational cruising to accelerate. The wind was eliminated with a buffer spell and the ship switched over to inertial cruising after the acceleration was complete.

The wind this produced shook and rustled across England as a collapsing wall of air.

And a line of several students on the fourth level began to move as if pushed on by that blowing wind.

Someone would take a step and then the next person would follow.

“Now, then.”

When someone spoke, they all began to run with a light but lasting speed.

Their individual destinations were the locations of their confrontations.

A battle on two fronts had begun between Musashi, England, and Tres España.

For England, it was Mary’s execution and the battle to stop it.

For Tres España, it was the armada battle using the Grande y Felicísima Armada.

The sound of a bell filled the air.

That sound gave advanced notice of Mary’s execution and also indicated the beginning of the armada battle. To the members of Musashi running to London, it was a signal gun telling them to run.

A clash was about to begin on two battlefields: the sky and London.

Chapter 52: Parting Ways in the Night Sky

CHAPTER 52

"Parting Ways in the Night Sky"



Do you shout 'why'
Because you have yet to give up all hope?
Point Allocation (Relative Importance of the Past)

Do you shout 'why'

Because you have yet to give up all hope?

Point Allocation (Relative Importance of the Past)

Mary saw the remnants of the setting sun through the closed shutters.

Her room's lights were not on.

...It's just about six o'clock.

Her execution was at seven. Once she changed her clothes and walked up to the Andamio de la Ejecución, history would advance.

She could tell her senses had grown sharper and she sighed.

The festival outside had long since ended. The people would be hiding as the war approached, so the city would only contain the Trumps and other warriors.

A few of the Trumps were scattered around in other places. Howard and Jonson were recording the armada battle from Drake's patrol ship while Hawkins and Cavendish were helping send Musashi's normal citizens to IZUMO. Pirate Queen Grace was apparently protecting her birthplace of Ireland.

Even so, most of them had remained in London.

...No one will come to abduct me.

She did not know how right it was to say "abduct" rather than "rescue".

But then a knock came on her door. She heard the voices of the wooden chairs that were house spirits and acted as her maids.

"Can we bring?" "Your change of clothes?" "Yet?"

"Judge," she replied.

After a hesitant pause, the presences beyond the door left.

It was about time. She would change her clothes at the bottom of the northwestern tower and then climb to the execution stage.

The execution would return her body to the ley line and strengthen Ex. Caliburn's ley line connection. That would extend Ex. Caliburn's range to halfway between the mainland and England and it would allow the sword to be fired more quickly in succession.

Once that happened, no enemy would be able to approach England.

She would become a cornerstone toward eternally protecting England.

Becoming such a cornerstone seemed like true salvation for someone who was treated as if they had never been born.

...But which one of us was it that cried when we first learned about this?

Had it been her or her sister? She did not know. However...

"Save you from anything."

That's what this is, she thought while picking up a color from her desk.

It was a red fabric. She had tried to make a scarf, but it had come out more as a muffler. She spread it out and tried holding it up around her neck.

...Do I look like Master Tenzou?

She looked in the mirror, but she did not. She had to hide her face even more. She smiled bitterly at the fact that she had never managed to see his face and she placed the scarf in her pocket.

She then started toward the door, but she heard a sudden sound from the southern shutter. It was the sound of flapping wings and a hard object.

"Milton?"

She ran over to the shutter and quickly opened it.

However, she found no one on the other side of the window. It was already night and a blackout was in effect, so she could not sense many people in the city and she would never see the crow even if she looked into the sky.

She accepted the disappointment in her heart and sighed. When she lowered her shoulders and gaze, she noticed a dagger on the windowsill.

The double-sided dagger was small enough to fit in the hand and it was the type used by ninja. Tenzou had used one while digging up the dirt and making small contraptions. This one had its bottom end pointed south toward the Musashi and the tip pointed toward her.

“It can’t be...”

What did she truly want? She picked up the dagger without knowing the answer and she looked south toward the Musashi.

Juana liked riding on ships.

What she did not like were small, dark places. Such places were common on ships, but she oddly did not mind when it was on a ship.

It was likely because her very first memory of relief was on a ship. That memory was of the few days after being saved on the night of the Lepanto. It had been her first time in a bright room and her first time to be able to do as she pleased. She had enjoyed how everyone there had interacted with her and how the cities visible from the sky had looked so pretty during both day and night.

At the time, she had felt glad to have lied.

That was why she had been afraid of growing in the orphanage Velázquez had sent her to. On the day for the orphanage to check her growth during her second

year there, she had gone to a corner of the room to try to hide in a dark place once more.

...But the secretary came to save me.

“Due to my business... Actually, I can’t tell you about that until you’ve come of age,” he had said. “Well, a lot happened and I was driven out of my family’s clan. That’s why I’m not big on the superiority complex the long-lived tend to have.”

That was Velázquez’s opinion on the matter and he had said more after stressing that lying was wrong.

“When asked about your dream for the future, you said you wanted to ‘save mister’, so how about you try to make that happen? How about you give it everything you’ve got? If it’s for that, I’ll support your lie.”

To receive higher education, it helped to be long-lived. That was doubly so for someone without Velázquez’s intelligence, without an inherited name family, and without the ability to fight. By moving between orphanages and academies about once a year, she had reached her current position. She guessed it had been part of Velázquez’s plan, but moving all over the nation had helped her in another way.

...It familiarized me with the true state of Tres España.

Those experiences had been useful in achieving her position as vice president and making many different decisions afterwards.

...Even now, I’m lying.

However, she was using what that lie had given her to save Tres España.

For that reason, she felt it was for the best to keep up the act. At least until she had grown and she was forced to leave the one she cared about, that is.

At present, she was faced with a certain problem.

“We are not quite there yet, but it isn’t going to be easy. I can’t seem to put together a scenario to restore Tres España from its decline.”

It can't be done, thought Juana.

The biggest problems were the loss of the Grande y Felicísima Armada and the nation's decline it produced. England would continue to show off its power with privateers, so the loss of their aerial fleet was painful. If it hindered their investment in trade and others insisted on repayment, it would strike a fatal blow to Tres España and its weak domestic industry.

...How can we recover from that?

She opened small cathedrals on both her shoulders. The laptop-style handheld cathedrals were mounted on her uniform and they opened countless *cadena firma* on either side and in front of her.

“Please show me what you hold, Testament.”

“Activating : Accepted : Welcome to the World of the Testament!! : Complete”

Enough *cadena firma* appeared to fill the guest room she had been given. They were all documents related to Tres España.

As they were rewritten in real time, Juana felt they looked like city lights.

She disliked dark places and that was likely why she always ate dinner in the food cart district. While reaching toward the collection of *cadena firma* that represented a nation, she felt as if she were touching a city.

“I need to restrain myself better.”

Her style was to draw out the necessary data with a voice recognition search. That meant she did not have to close or open *cadena firma* and could therefore maintain her train of thought. However, this was more *cadena firma* than a Mouse or normal contract could fully handle, so she needed the ability to accumulate and manage them all.

Juana also used the small cathedrals on either hip while working through it all.

She lined up all the data on the nation and displayed the links between data with lines of light.

Link lines of ether light raced through the air and the spots with the most connections were the most important.

However, she also had to watch out for data with a large number of views but few link lines. Those had their usage limited due to their great importance and they tended to be related to hospitals, the Testament, and welfare.

Unsurprisingly, there was a fairly heavy bias toward wartime industry at the moment. Quite a few maintenance factories around the nation were running, but she guessed that was because they were seeing to the maintenance of the Grande y Felicísima Armada.

...Whatever the case, I need to support our domestic industry.

The food and clothing industries were in an especially catastrophic state, but she could not return them to their former state without any funds. If they were forced to make payments to the traders, the student council and chancellor's officers would be completely ineffectual.

To recover, she had to avoid rushing things. She could use the fishing and shipbuilding industries to first restore the coastal regions. To distribute the insufficient industries to other cities, it would likely be best to make the coastal distribution by ship more efficient. She would need to get the different cities to work together, though.

“And to do that, I need the king's will.”

She needed a king who would unify and lead the cities. According to the Testament descriptions, Felipe II had continued ruling after the armada battle and had tried to somehow stop the decline while also announcing the nation's bankruptcy.

However, he had not managed it.

...I...

She decided she would not let that happen. She would repay him for saving her.

“My preliminary calculations say it will take about forty years to stop the negative trend, but it would only take twenty without the armada battle.”

What would he say if she showed him that information?

“He would probably call it ‘amazing’ as if it was someone else’s problem...but I wonder if he would praise me.”

In a few years, she would have to leave. As she aged, who she truly was would show itself and she was intent on leaving before her lie was found out.

...I need to leave him a path he can take without worrying.

She closed her eyes and thought about how the result of the armada battle would clarify how she could repay him in the future.

“Testament.”

She nodded, stood up, and produced a *cadena firma* in order to contact him on his ship.

However...

...It won't connect?

This was strange. The data on her *cadena firma* was being taken from all over Tres España, so why could she not contact the ship right next to the one she was on?

And something else was strange as well: the ship shook beneath her feet.

“Eh? Why?”

She felt the movement of inertia in her legs and body.

“Why are we turning back toward España and accelerating?”

A giant shape travelling through the sky sent a spray of water into that sky.

The entirety of its eight ship form was difficult to see while standing on it. The only place where it was almost possible was the back of Musashino. The combined bridge was located within the giant arch-shaped upper surface there.

The thirty meter square floor was dimly lit, but several slate-shaped displays brought in outside information. The area was filled with automatons and very few people accompanied them.

The automatons exchanged information via their shared memory and performed high-speed data processing using their artificial brains.

Because of this, there were no chairs, desks, or lights. There was only the sign frame notification board system embedded in the floor and ceiling and...

“This is our guest chair, but will it suffice, Adele-sama? Over.”

Adele was the only human in the room.

While seated, Adele looked at the figure to her side.

“Judge. I see the automatons always remain standing, ‘Musashino’-san.”

“Judge,” replied a maid doll with semi-long hair and eyes opened in a way that made her look sleepy.

...From what I've heard, she's performing a good bit of the management for all the ships in her head.

Adele decided not to interrupt and opened a sign frame, but “Musashino” staggered a bit and spoke up.

“Shall I turn on the lights? They cannot be seen from outside, so do not worry. Over.”

“Oh, don’t go to the trouble. And shouldn’t you relax a little?”

Adele was on top of a giant spell radar screen that was changing moment by moment. The countless red dots of the Grande y Felicísima Armada were located at the front end.

“We won’t be in firing range for another fifteen minutes, so you should probably try to stay put and work on...optimizing control of the ship, was it?”

“Judge. I have determined that would be the best way of ensuring the Musashi’s safety. Excuse me. Over.”

“Musashino’s” knees collapsed to the floor. Her butt landed in a sitting position and she closed her eyes while Adele sighed next to her.

It must take a large burden to make an automaton choose to rest, thought Adele as she looked forward.

A small version of the Musashi hovered in the air there. It was a model Musashi made of ether light and it used color and sign frames to reflect the state and cruising attitude of the ship.

Currently, the Musashi was switching from inertial cruising to normal cruising after it had accelerated with gravitational cruising.

However, its high speed knocked away the ocean created on the surface of its armor in normal cruising, so it had difficulty obtaining buoyancy. For that reason, it had its waterline set higher than usual and was repeatedly producing a new ocean.

This state provided poor fuel efficiency for normal cruising, but they would run out of fuel in about ten minutes if they used gravitational cruising. Calculations suggested this intermittent acceleration method would provide two hours of combat mobility on the level of a high-speed ship.

It was indeed an inefficient cruising method, but their normal cruising would not suffice if the enemy sent out high-speed ships.

...Our decision is based on that assumption.

Words came from the sign frames around Adele.

Asama: “Lacking Headquarters, this is the archery firing team. We have taken up our positions and are currently checking on our targeting positions, chain of command, and instruction patterns.”

Gold Mar: “The mobile aerial team is doing the same.”

Tonbokiri: “The ship warrior team is the same. Adele-dono, as you are the current commander, I would like for you to double-check the flow of the battle in order to raise all of our morale.”

“Judge,” verbally replied Adele. “Oh, whoops.”

She then moved her hands instead of her mouth.

Flat Vassal: “Then let’s go over the general flow of the armada battle.”

Adele looked at the image of the ships hovering before her while she typed.

Flat Vassal: “Essentially, the armada battle is the English fleet intercepting the Grande y Felicísima Armada’s attempt to invade England, but the Grande y Felicísima Armada begins retreating while circling around England.”

Noriki: “It circles around England even though it’s retreating?”

Flat Vassal: “Judge. It travels counter-clockwise around England while pursued by the English fleet. And while that happens...”

She redisplayed the outline of the battle that had already been sent to everyone.

Guide Program for the Armada Battle – Created by Lacking Headquarters

1: “Hostilities Begin off of Plymouth at Southwestern England”

At this point, the English fleet circles around from behind and to the right of the Española fleet to behind and to the left. The Tres Español vice-flagship, the Santa Ana, is incapacitated. Also, the Tres Español treasury ship, the San Salvador, is accidentally set on fire and leaves.

2: “Second Round off of Portland at Southern England”

Tres España’s fleet forms a defensive formation while England’s fleet pursues and destroys ships one by one.

3: “Resupply Time”

But it is mercilessly interrupted.

4: “Third Round off of Southeastern England”

Off of Calais on the Far Eastern mainland, England’s fleet crashes eight fire ships into Tres España’s fleet to throw them into confusion.

5: “Fourth Round off of Gravelines near Calais”

From here, Tres España begins retreating north and around England. England’s fleet begins pursuit.

6: “Pursuit Ends off of Southwestern England”

After circling England, the Tres Español fleet is almost entirely destroyed. The armada battle ends.

Flat Vassal: “That pretty much sums it up. It actually took several days, but given the size of England and the speed of the ships, it should only take a few hours. The number of days will probably be interpretively settled by stalling for time after the fact. What matters for us is to faithfully reproduce the events.”

Adele then removed her fingers from the keyboard.

Based on the progress of the program, Adele decided the majority of the armada battle would be settled in the series of conflicts south of England.

However, the history recreation would sometimes change the meaning of a result. For example...

Flat Vassal: “Even if England wins, it’s all over for us if the Musashi is falling apart afterwards.”

Asama: “But Tres España should speed up their retreat to minimize their losses.”

Adele agreed that would be the best option and England had given the same opinion. They had said the Grande y Felicísima Armada would quickly continue with its retreat in order to prevent as much of Tres España’s decline as possible.

Flat Vassal: “After all, they can only lose when it comes to fighting the Musashi rather than the English fleet.”

Marube-ya: “Just firing shells and taking damage is probably a waste of money.”

More importantly, England had made a certain prediction.

Flat Vassal: “They may quickly pass by us and flee while leaving behind the Santa Ana and San Salvador. Then they’ll take up a defensive position at Calais for Part 4 of the program and retreat from there. We can’t carelessly approach because they have their stealth ship, the San Martín, so they can use that fact to

leave behind the ships to be sunk by the fire ships and immediately begin retreating around England.”

Worshipper: “It seems to me that the best plan would be to make a secret agreement with them to end this as quickly as possible.”

However, England and the Testament Union would not allow that. If England did not ensure Tres España’s decline, the nation could easily strike back.

Flat Vassal: “The Musashi has been hired as England’s mercenary, so we need to give them the results they want. Also, the Testament Union is monitoring the history recreation between England and Tres España. If the two nations conspire to preserve their strength, the Testament Union will punish them.”

She felt it was an annoyance, but...

Flat Vassal: “Anyway, most of the cannons are focused on the front of the first port and starboard ships. We should be able to shoot down more during the pursuit around England than any other time. We could enter stealth cruising and keep our distance until then, but stealth cruising is pretty slow.”

Asama: “We can’t do it at this speed?”

“Judge,” Adele typed into her keyboard.

Flat Vassal: “The stealth barriers will cause internal interference with each other and destroy each other. Secondary stealth is out of the question and even primary stealth would consume twice the fuel of gravitational cruising at this speed.”

Gold Mar: “Yeah, the Musashi’s pretty big.”

Flat Vassal: “Judge. It seems Tres España’s stealth ship has decent speed, but continuous high-speed movement should still be tough. I assume it will be moving more intermittently. If possible, I want to avoid a fight between stealth ships. We’re so big that they can fire blindly and still hit us.”

The general consensus was that a direct confrontation such as that was unlikely. Tres España would be thinking about the future more than a serious attempt to sink the Musashi. If they began the pursuit soon after the battle began, the battle would primarily consist of the Musashi firing forward at the back of the Tres Españan ships.

That would be a good thing for the Musashi.

...After all, we're not a warship.

The Musashi's gravity barrier system was excellent as equipment for a city.

The Testament Union had approved it to defend against pirate attacks that would threaten the combined benefits of trade and it had done an excellent job of protecting them during the Battle of Mikawa.

But how would it fare during a prolonged bombing or shelling? They had their estimates, but those were not certain.

The best plan was to avoid such a situation if at all possible.

For that reason, the pursuit part of the battle was better for them than the earlier melee.

An automaton standing at the front of the bridge held out her hands. A torii-shaped lever made of ether light appeared below her hands, she grabbed it, and she slowly pushed it forward.

“Reaccelerating. Once we pass below the Grande y Felicísima Armada, we will circle around behind it. Over.”

“Judge. Make our turn wider than entirely necessary.”

What both sides feared was damage to their own forces during the early melee. They would preserve the flow of the history recreation and avoid all damage until the end of the conflicts south of England. Adele felt the real battle began during the later retreat and pursuit.

The other side likely felt the same way, so...

“Use our actions to show them what we’re thinking. Exaggerate our motions to show them how we will move next.”

“Judge,” replied the helmsman automaton as she moved the ship forward.

On the spell radar below them, the red dots of the Grande y Felicísima Armada approached. It was a large fleet of 130 ships in all and it included some ships borrowed from K.P.A. Italia.

Once the Musashi slipped below them and circled behind them with a turning ascent, the battle would begin.

Adele took in a breath and watched the front of the Musashi’s course overlap the red dots.

“Everyone, begin!”

Adele’s shout set everyone in motion.

While the ship ascended, it would turn hard to the left to circle behind and to the right of the Tres Españan fleet.

Inertia pushed everything to the right and the ship groaned, but no one forgot what they had to do.

Those in charge of securing materiel held down the hooks and ropes, the gunners aimed their sights forward, and the warriors crouched low and awaited orders.

A massive fleet was visible in the sky like a group of clouds.

However, two people’s heads suddenly shot up as everyone carried out their duties.

One was “Musashino” who had been curled up sleeping next to Adele.

The other was Suzu who sat in the waiting room next to the bridge because she was their ambassador. She looked up while sitting next to “Musashi” who was looking after Suzu and managing the gravity barriers.

“Huh?”

After a moment of confusion, the two people divided by a wall simultaneously shook their head and said different things.

First, “Musashino” spoke.

“Enemy relocated!! Over.”

And then Suzu.

“That’s not it!!”

An instant later, everyone on the Musashi saw the sky split apart.

As they approached the Grande y Felicísima Armada, it suddenly split to the east and west.

One side was larger than the other. The piece moving west toward Tres España was large and the one moving east toward England was small.

The speed at which the split occurred confused everyone. How had it been able to split so quickly?

Ships had a front and a back and they could only move slowly while moving backwards. However, the majority of the fleet splitting off toward Tres España was moving faster than the small portion of the fleet moving toward England.

The answer to that question came into view as the Musashi ascended.

The light of the two full moons revealed it.

“The majority of the Grande y Felicísima Armada heading toward Tres España has its bow pointed that way!?”

Those ships had likely turned around back when the fleet had been deployed into the airspace. The ships to return to Tres España had been stopped while pointing backwards and only those meant to continue on to England had faced forward.

This trick had used the fact that spell radar did not show the direction of a ship.

“But why did they split their fleet in two!?”

The term “pincer attack” came to mind, but that would mean a frenzied clash between the two sides. That would cause the most damage to both of them.

Also...

“The retreating fleet is not lowering its speed! It is leaving the combat airspace! Over!”

Despite splitting off only a few ships to head to England and having the majority leave, the Grande y Felicísima Armada accelerated towards its different destinations.

The Musashi was already on track to pursue the smaller England-bound fleet from behind, but a single question filled the minds of everyone aboard the Musashi.

Why would they do this?

Juana ran down the corridor. With the divine transmission closed, she could only confirm it with her own eyes.

The ship was currently moving forward, but “forward” likely meant toward Tres España.

They were advancing in a direction that looked like a retreat and there was only one place she could go to determine the reason for it.

...*The rear deck!*

She activated a defensive spell and opened the hatch before her. The air entering from outside was weakened by the deck's buffering spell, but it still felt like having a thick blanket thrown at her. She forced her shoulders through that pressure to reach the night sky.

“Go back inside!!”

Suddenly, white spears appeared from either side and crossed in front of her chest. She looked over and found warriors on either side.

“I am Vice President Juana! On whose orders are we returning to Tres-...”

She trailed off when she saw the ships continuing toward England.

The ship leading those few rapidly-leaving ships was the former San Lorenzo and she knew who was aboard it.

“That is his ship!! Why is it and only a few other ships continuing to England!?”

She reflexively attempted to move forward, but crossed spears blocked her path once more. There were more spears this time, but she only watched the ships growing more distant beyond them.

She felt like they would soon disappear forever, so she wrinkled her brow.

“_____!!”

As soon as she took a few hurried steps forward, a voice over the divine network seemed to slam into her.

“Um, can you all hear me?”

It was *his* voice.

A man was displayed on the large visual sign frame on the front of the ceiling in Musashi's bridge.

With the night sky in the background, the middle-aged man's hair and worn-out uniform blew in the wind. He pushed up his glasses and took a moment as if thinking about what to say.

"G-good evening. This is Tres España Chancellor and Student Council President Felipe Segundo. Presently, um, we are approaching the ocean south of England for the history recreation of the armada battle."

Adele asked a question despite not knowing if her voice would reach him or if he would respond.

"What is going on!? Why is the Grande y Felicísima Armada falling back!?"

It seemed her question did reach him because he gave a small nod.

"No...it isn't falling back." He wiped away a nervous sweat with his sleeve.

"Um, my ships...that is, these old-style ships and the ones that will be joining it are the true Grande y Felicísima Armada. Just look."

With that, light filled the floor below Adele.

New red dots appeared in front of and around the Musashi as it pursued Segundo.

The lights were small and an automaton commented on their size.

"I have determined they are about the size of large fishing boats. Most likely, they were hiding in the waves with their engines off, but they should not be armed with anything more than small cannons. Over."

There were only a few at first, but their numbers soon grew quite high.

Their numbers continued to grow and grow like a wave, until...

“Eh?”

Adele saw the color red filling the floor like a solid block.

“Are these...?”

“Fishing boats!? No, these are small guard ships used to protect local ports!”

Those armed with guns visually confirmed the enemies from the deck of the Musashi as it ascended and advanced. Countless ships rose as if pursuing and lifting up the Musashi from below.

“These are modified old-style ships! They’re pretty damn old. I think Tres España’s automatic galley type was... Yes, it was the type used back when my old man lived there!”

What was going on? Some stared blankly and others curiously, but someone gulped and continued.

“I think it was 25 years ago.”

Yes.

“These are the ships used in the Lepanto!”

“Yes, that’s right.”

Aboard the leading ship, Segundo spoke while watching the countless smaller ships rise.

He breathed a sigh of relief that the meaning of their actions had finally gotten through. He also realized anew just how much he did not like being the target of so much attention.

Many, many *cadena firma* had appeared around him. The glowing text gave the words of the owners of the ships that had literally ascended onto the stage.

“I’m here.” “I’m here, commander.” “As promised, I’m here to save the nation, our captain.”

“Testament. Thank you for coming. We all know the password: use the money we have, give in to our passions, have a party, and forget everything unpleasant. So let’s do exactly that. Let’s make this the site of our final *falla* festival.”

He wondered how that would work as he watched the Musashi rise from below. It lifted the wind which spilled over and formed clouds of fog, so it looked like an entire city rising from the ocean.

...*How nostalgic.*

He had not taken part in the Battle of Itsukushima, but Itsukushima had looked the same way in the distance. It had been massive and it had toyed with the wind.

...*But it lost. So...*

“Um... We will now begin the armada battle. This can be the Musashi of the English fleet vs. the Grande y Felicísima Armada or it can be the Musashi vs. the remnants of the Lepanto and Itsukushima. Either one works for me.”

And...

“Everyone and every nation listening to this, please remember one thing.”

Elizabeth watched Segundo’s divine transmission from the waiting area prepared in the Tower of London’s courtyard in order to watch over the execution. She expressionlessly watched Segundo brush a hand through his hair on the sign frame.

“The Grande y Felicísima Armada will now use its full strength to sink the Musashi, but as promised, we will carry out the history recreation. So...”

So...

“My Grande y Felicísima Armada will be destroyed in accordance with that recreation, but I want you to remember one thing. Even if the Grande y Felicísima Armada is destroyed, the San Martín and the rest of Tres España’s forces will remain unharmed.”

“In other words...” The Fairy Queen spoke sharply with her eyebrows slightly raised. “You had already set up the same method we used with the Musashi! You’re using the fleet defeated in the Lepanto as a replacement for the Grande y Felicísima Armada!!”

“Yes, Tres España will lose the Grande y Felicísima Armada and decline, but that decline will be interpretive. The Grande y Felicísima Armada I have brought here is made up of relics our ports were unsure what to do with. They are the symbol of a victory in name only, but that was a lie. It was no victory. After all...”

After all...

“I was unable to protect my wife and child. When Chancellor Carlos I appointed me as the next chancellor when he had never even met me, I thought he had given me a place to die. I thought he was telling me to give something back by protecting something great in the very end.”

Everyone watched him smile over the divine transmission and he then shrugged.

“S-see? I’m so pitiful that I’m shaking. I’m really scared. I’m scared of my own resolve, of what I’m going to do, and of everything else. I’m no hero and I’m no king. I’m nothing but a coward who can’t do anything and yet managed to survive. I’m nothing but your average old man. But...”

But...

“What’s wrong with someone like that trying to save Tres España?”

He forced a smile and then indicated the lights of the Lepanto that split to the left and right while pursuing the Musashi.

“Look. Without these ships, the ports don’t have to waste money maintaining them, more space is freed up, new fishing boats and transport ships can be built, and a newer Tres España can be made. ...And Tres España also has Juana. If you need a chancellor after me, have her do it. I’m certain she can bring prosperity to the nation.”

And if that happened...

“I may not have been able to protect anything, but maybe I was able to create something.”

“Chancellor!!”

Juana shouted through the night from beyond the giant form rising from below and the fishing fires pursuing it.

“What about me! What about what I want!?”

She was being left behind.

He was not yet guaranteed to die, but what was it he wanted?

...If the destruction of the Grande y Felicísima Armada is settled with an interpretation and we lose our king...

It could be said that they had passed the era of decline.

He was trying to disappear to make that happen.

He was trying to leave after giving her the position of the next era’s chancellor.

She could no longer reach him and she could not stand by his side, but if her voice could reach him...

“Chancellor!”

No, that was not it. She needed to make sure he turned her way.

“Mister!!”

She shouted the word she had used whenever she had lost sight of him on the ship she had taken on the way back from being saved. She also cried just as she had back then.

“Don’t leave me behind!!”

For an instant, Segundo did not understand what he had heard.

...Was that...?

That was a nostalgic word. It was a word that had relied on him even though he had been unable to save or protect anything.

He had made the promise to communicate by letters in order to preserve that sense of relief.

However, a woman was now speaking that word over the divine transmission.

“Mister.”

Her hair was a mess, her glasses crooked, and she attempted to break free of the people restraining her.

“I’m sorry!”

She took a rough breath and spoke.

“I’m sorry for lying!! So...so...don’t leave me behind!!”

“Juana.”

“No!”

What did that word of rejection mean? Her next words gave Segundo’s thoughts the push they needed to make the jump from confusion to understanding.

“I am...I am the child from back then! I didn’t understand anything back then and I was a child, so I lied!”

She continued before he could tell her to wait.

“I am half-lived, but I lied and said I was long-lived!”

She took a breath.

“And I made my way to your side while keeping up the lie!”

“I can’t do it!”

Juana forced the words from her throat with tears on her face.

“I’m the one that must eventually leave! I lied, so I was going to disappear before the truth was discovered!”

Why?

“Mister!”

This was what had resided in her heart back then and now.

“I don’t want you to leave me!”

Segundo took a few hard breaths.

He did not entirely understand the situation he was faced with and his knees had been trembling for quite a while now, but he knew one thing for sure.

...*I have to.*

He watched her sob and struggle to free herself from the people restraining her.

...*I have to protect her.*

With that thought, he gave a small nod and opened his mouth.

“J-Juana.”

...*Calm down. This isn't like you at all, but calm down.*

He calmed himself and spoke clearly.

“You...read one of the letters that girl wrote me, didn't you? So, um...”

He had to say it.

“You're doing this to keep me from doing this, but...how should I put it?”

Juana watched and listened. In the *cadena firma*, Segundo covered his face with his hands and spoke in a trembling voice.

“You don't have to...pretend to be...that girl.”

He let out a breath and relaxed his body. He lowered the hands covering his face and revealed only a smile.

“Commander of the returning fleet.”

“Testament,” replied a voice from a new *cadena firma*.

It displayed Fusae with the dimly-lit sky in the background and Segundo spoke to her.

“It seems the girl who sends me those letters was half-lived. And, well, Juana was only pretending to be her to keep me from doing this, so...what was said here doesn't count, okay?”

“Testament. Ju is long-lived. I guarantee it.”

“Thanks,” he said.

During the pause after that, Juana stopped moving.

During her silence that could be telling him to wait or stop, he spoke.

“Juana.”

She both wanted to and did not want to hear what he would say with that smile on his face.

“You grew up splendidly.”

After that single comment, the *cadena firma* vanished.

Juana wanted to say something, shout something, protest something.

“...”

But she slipped from the arms restraining her and landed in a sitting position.

She heard a voice, but it seemed to come from her own throat as she hung her head.

“Ahh...”

She collapsed forward and her throat trembled.

“Ahhhhhhhhhhhhhh!!”

Meanwhile, the Musashi finally showed itself in the sky.

It had no choice but to pursue the small fleet of the true Grande y Felicísima Armada and the larger retreating fleet took a certain action on Fusae's instructions.

“Prepare a gun salute wishing the Grande y Felicísima Armada victory!!”

At least three hundred cannons targeted the Musashi's stern at once.

“Fire!!”

Adele realized this was a dangerous situation.

Tres España's leading fleet was moving quickly toward England's south coast, so the Musashi had to pursue it. However, they were also being fired on from behind.

...And they have small ships to our port and starboard!

This was not good. They had few cannons on the port and starboard and the enemy fleet rising on either side was made up of only small ships. With their high mobility, the cannons intended for large ships would be unable to target them.

The enemy would have to approach to use their small cannons, but that would create a complete frenzy of a battle.

The enemy had chosen the exact kind of battle the Musashi most needed to avoid.

The reason for this was obvious. The original assumption had been that both sides would avoid damage, but the enemy now did not care if they were destroyed.

They were not simply desperate; they were prepared to die. To ensure their deaths were not wasted, they had chosen where they would die.

The enemy was too close to switch to stealth cruising now. They were moving too fast for secondary stealth, they were not prepared for the switch, and primary stealth was useless when their location was already known.

...What are we supposed to do?

The enemy came with enough speed and density that she had no time to think.

The enemy's numbers were massive and an automaton shouted a report on the attack from behind.

"The retreating fleet's ether cannons and physical divine protection cannons will hit in fifteen seconds. Over!"

A moment later, "Musashi" had the Musashi repeatedly open gravity barriers behind itself and hundreds of shells exploded.

While the Musashi was shaken and lit up by the impacts and explosions, the fishing fires attacked from the bottom of either side.

The attacks were swift.

Alarms filled the night sky. Light from the Musashi's spell floodlights searched for the Lepanto fishing fires that pressed in with overwhelming numbers.

Segundo's voice reached everyone who watched it.

"Now, how about we get started, everyone?"

The survivors of the Lepanto ascended as they listened to the man they had once called "commander" and "captain".

Eight massive forms existed overhead and each one was as large as a city, but everyone faced that enemy with hope in their eyes.

"It's finally time," said someone. "It's finally time to do what we weren't able to back then."

Namely...

“We can protect something.”

“We can save something.”

“That’s right.”

New bearers of fishing fires approached. When they called out, they could hear each other over the wind rather than the divine transmission.

“Are you the Lepanto group? We’re the survivors of Itsukushima.”

“It’s been a while. Not that we ever got to meet each other back then.”

Words of agreement gathered along with the fishing fires.

“We had only just barely survived, but now I wonder if we could’ve saved someone if we’d rushed over to you right away back then.”

“It’s not too late to save someone now.”

Someone asked who had kids and lots of hands rose into the air. Someone then asked who had grandkids.

“That’s a lot of us. But both those with and those without are going to save them now.”

“This isn’t a victory given to us through interpretation. Let’s go get a real victory we can believe in.”

“Let’s go to our festival. The fires of war will light our *falla*.”

“So give us our orders, captain.”

They all spoke.

“Give us our *falla* fishing grounds that can set ablaze what has been smoldering within us for 25 years.”

“Testament. In that case, you’re all the same as me,” said Segundo. “Let’s sink the Musashi.”

And...

“Let’s show England that the empire on which the sun never sets will continue strong for all time.”

At 6:07 PM, Tres España’s Grande y Felicísima Armada and the Musashi engaged in combat while cruising toward southern England.

At the same time, Musashi’s representatives arrived at London on the second level of England. They turned around to observe the repeated lights and noises in the southwestern sky. As they ran, the one trailing silver hair spoke.

“An ambush was waiting for the Musashi on either side!?”

“They said they’re the survivors of the Lepanto and Itsukushima, right?” said Urquiaga. “In non-Far Eastern nations, the trouble of preparing land ports is eliminated by allowing aerial ships to travel on the ocean. They likely left this evening, shut down their engines on the ocean, and disguised themselves.”

“How long have they been planning this ridiculous misunderstanding?”

“Probably ever since 25 years ago. I can’t quite manage it, but I can almost understand.”

They heard a great roar and countless lights appeared in the sky.

The cannon fire had begun.

As the massive number of old-style ships fired and the Musashi intercepted them, the light was lit up as if by distant lightning.

“I wonder if Margot is fighting,” muttered Naruze.

“We’ll be fighting soon as well,” replied Mitotsudaira.

The density of houses on either side of the road was growing. Ahead of them was a wall with a closed gate. A group of warriors with spears and spell shields waited in front of the gate.

“I will handle this,” said Urquiaga. “You can leave the warriors who approach from behind to me as well. Our opponents at Mikawa were Catholic, so...”

“You were useless?” suggested Tenzou.

“No, Catholic inquisitors have a point card for each time we strike a heretic, but I only gained a single point last time. If I do not earn enough to make up for last time too, I will not get the discount on the goods I want.”

“I-isn’t that pretty secular for an inquisitor!?”

“Don’t worry about it.” Urquiaga raised his main wings, moved forward, and passed by Tenzou in the lead. “Tenzou, when you gave your notification of leaving the school, you did not throw out your possessions, did you?”

“I sent all the older sister porn games to your house, Uqui-dono. The package is labelled ‘porn games’.”

“Damn you!!”

“Enough of that,” said Mitotsudaira as she also moved up ahead.

She attached the obelisks for her two remaining silver chains on the back of her shoulders and glanced up into the sky.

“The full moon. An excellent night. I am in a good mood, so I’ll help out a bit.”

The warriors up ahead deepened their defensive stances as Urquiaga charged forward and a giant strike was swung down on either side by the silver chains.

“Go on ahead, Tenzou! Go and represent the will of our king and princess!!”

The ninja ran straight through the sounds of destruction and the result thereof.

He intentionally avoided looking at the battle behind him and the Musashi's crisis in the southern sky.

Beyond the gate, he entered the dark city of London.

Chapter 53: Encounter Over a Distance

CHAPTER 53

"Encounter Over a Distance"



Is a greeting necessary for a reunion?
Point Allocation (Agreement)

Is a greeting necessary for a reunion?

Point Allocation (Agreement)

A giant collection of ships writhed through the sky.

The eight ships of the Musashi bent the connections between them as they advanced.

But even as the Musashi pursued Tres España's leading fleet, countless smaller ships flew along either side of it. Their small cannons were weak, but they used their numbers and speed to attack up and down the port and starboard sides to stop the much larger ships.

The Musashi repeatedly moved the connections between its eight ships in serpentine arcs to prevent the smaller ships from targeting it.

The light surrounding it came from the bright illumination spells and the cannon fire that resembled rain or pillars of fire.

The sounds came from the wind of falling and flight, the rumbling of impacts, and the destruction of shell strikes.

Countless whitecaps formed on the Musashi's waterline, but that was not all that hovered in the air. Many trails of smoke rose from the upper level cities. Holes had been torn in the external armor and primary armor on the surface, so the light of ether fuel was forming smoke and rising into the sky.

It was not devastating damage, but the damage continued piling up.

“Even if it's a quasi-Bahamut Class, it isn't so much of a monster that it's untouchable.”

Three people watched from the sky east of England. Drake, Howard, and Jonson of the Trumps were recording the state of the battle from a patrol boat hovering there.

Drake handed his binoculars to Howard and turned to Jonson.

“Do you need a pair too? They have night vision.”

“No, no, no. I injected myself with a drug just now, so my night vision is perfect.”

“I really don’t understand any of this,” said Howard while setting the focus on the binoculars.

“If you don’t want to be eaten, tell me what you think.”

“Testament. Is Musashi in real trouble here?”

“You really don’t understand this, do you?” Drake sighed. “The Musashi hasn’t been sunk because Tres España doesn’t have much firepower and because the Musashi’s outer shell is made so it won’t be breached by small cannons. Still, it’s already putting off smoke and the armor isn’t infinitely strong. The accumulated damage will wear it down and probably cause it to collapse from the top down. But look.”

Drake pointed at the distant Musashi with his right hand and used his left to alternatively point between the smaller ships on the left and right.

“That chancellor named Segundo has put the small ships in elliptical formations.”

“You mean those wheel-like formations?”

Drake nodded at his two liberal arts companions and began rotating his left hand and bringing it toward the right hand he was pointing toward the Musashi.

“The fleets on the left and right are rotating vertically. And so they rotate in from the outside. The ships making the upper arc of the loop slow down, fire on the Musashi from front to back, and then lower back down. The ships on the lower arc prepare to fire and raise their speed to move forward. By combining the two, they can fire continuously with no gaps. It gives the individual ships a chance to rest, but the Musashi has to constantly focus on their defense. This wheel

formation takes the old land version and makes a vertical arrangement for aerial combat. Also...”

Also...

“By splitting between port and starboard, they’re recreating the Battle of Plymouth from the Testament descriptions.”

Drake checked the program Musashi had sent them.

1: “Hostilities Begin off of Plymouth at Southwestern England”

At this point, the English fleet circles around from behind and to the right of the Españan fleet to behind and to the left. The Tres Españan vice-flagship, the Santa Ana, is incapacitated. Also, the Tres Españan treasury ship, the San Salvador, is accidentally set on fire and leaves.

“Do you get it? The wheel formation on either side sets the stage for circling from behind and to the right to behind and to the left. Because they’re rotating, they’re sort of always showing their back. But by always showing their ‘back’, they can recreate the situation without exposing their weak backside. The Musashi needs an attack that will drive a wedge into the wheel formation and expose that weak backside.”

“Mate, but are you saying Musashi can’t attack when the wheel formation is constantly attacking them?”

“Testament. That’s right. The great number of small ships lets Tres España form a constant upper and lower barrage. That prevents them from sending out their Technohexen aerial unit. They can only curl up in their shell like a turtle.” Drake clicked his tongue. “But I doubt Musashi isn’t giving this any thought. The situation’s only gonna get worse for them if they don’t do anything.”

He clicked his tongue again and Jonson turned toward him.

“You sound frustrated, mate.”

“Of course I am! That chicken and wolf are heading to London, so why the hell am I out here dealing with the history recreation? And I’m only interpretively taking part to monitor and record the battle, so I’m completely losing out.”

“Drake, you really support Musashi, don’t you?”

“Testament,” replied the Hard Wolf. He bared his teeth toward the Musashi as it zigzagged, poured out smoke, and received cannon fire in the distant sky.

“Dammit, what would I be doing if I was on the Musashi right now!? Oh, goddammit. I really don’t like war. It’s a waste of perfectly good human meat! But I can’t get enough of these riddles. It’s just so much fun solving the problems needed to survive on the battlefield. After all, solving them means preserving that delicious human meat! ...Who’s acting as the Musashi’s captain right now?”

“Testament. I believe it is Adele Balfette, a vassal from Hexagone Française.”

“Not much to eat on her!!”

His shout was immediately followed by a hunting horn filling the air. As the sound carried into the distance, it was joined by something else: additional cannon fire and sparks.

“The wheel formation has accelerated! They were only getting the hang of it before! Now it’s truly getting started!!”

As the attacks repeated and accelerated, the port and starboard sides of the Musashi were deafened and blinded.

The sounds of impact took out people’s hearing and the sparks did the same for their sight. They could only perceive the deck beneath their feet, the body heat of those next to them, and the weight of their outstretched arms and the purification shield covering their entire body.

While holy spells deflected enemy attacks, the purification shields purified the attacks to lessen their power. The impacts were lightened, but a stubborn strength and spirit were needed as they did not vanish altogether.

“Forward,” said someone. “Keep holding it forward!”

It sounded like he was speaking to himself, but it was also meant to reach the others.

They all shouted the same words like it was a magical spell.

After all...

“We trained for this!!”

They had only had about a week to train, but they had trained hard. And those who were in charge of the port and starboard defenses had learned one thing for sure and that one thing could be summed up in a single rule.

“Keep defending until we receive further orders!!”

What would those orders be?

The only new orders for those ordered to defend was to stop defending. If they had not received those orders, they were not to stop defending. That was obvious.

They were not to move.

If they did not move, they could protect what lay behind them.

If they did not move, they could protect something along with the people standing alongside them.

“That’s right!”

The attacks came and they came fast. The defenders could no longer take the time to look left or right and they could not give thanks to the others supporting them,

but they would support those same people if they were about to collapse. That was all there was to it.

They could only defend, so they could do nothing that would look cool. They could only curl up, tremble, and...

“Keep defending until we receive further orders!!”

“Judge!!”

Was there any meaning in that shout? Was there any meaning in psyching themselves up? Regardless...

“We will defend as ordered!” They took a breath. “Because we won’t let the Musashi sink!!”

Just as their voices overwhelmed the sound of the impacts, the defenders all heard another sound.

It was the same hunting horn as before and its second sounding could mean only one thing.

“Is the wheel formation going to accelerate again!?”

They all gasped at the thought of even more attacks and then a wall of impacts assaulted those defenders.

“Go!”

The crews of the small ships flew them at high speed.

With the first sounding of the hunting horn, they had simply increased the speed of the firing process, but with the second, they reduced the number of crew flying the ships to only a few and sent the others to help manage the cannons.

All of the ships had been used in the Lepanto, Itsukushima, or other old battles, so they had all been in service for twenty-five years or longer. They had been shifted over to patrol boats or guard ships at local ports and oftentimes became completely unused.

Some had even been sold and became transport ships or fishing boats.

Most of them had continued with those ships even after the war both because former warships had a long life and because...

“This desire was smoldering within us!”

Without wiping away their sweat, the men shouted within the light and rough wind of cannon fire. They were all past middle age and a lot had reached elderly.

“We tried to celebrate that we had survived, but even as we tried to find peace as the losers, we were made into the winners. ...And yet so many of our comrades had been lost!!”

They had modified the ships. To increase their stability in the high altitudes of open sea, they had attached bilge keels on the bottom of either side which gave them fish-like silhouettes.

“The commander really helped us out by giving us the money the vice president had saved up and claiming it was for a harbor project.”

“Yeah, but that wasn’t enough money to get the ships fixed up. I did it myself and just about had a heart attack when I came up with some extra screws afterwards. ...Of course, that’s how it’s always been!”

As they fired, they laughed without taking their eyes off the enemy.

“The ships don’t need to last much longer, anyway. We’re using old models against the Musashi at high altitude. All this firing is just about to shake the frames apart. I’ll be happy if they hold together long enough to circle England.”

Isn’t this fine?

“We can complete the history recreation just like this.”

“Testament. That we can.”

They fired, shot, and lobbed attacks. Some were physical shells, some were spells, and some were ether cannons. All the veterans working together attached cooling charms on their shoulders and divided countless metal shells between themselves.

They maintained the wheel formation and saw parts of the Musashi’s defensive formation on the verge of breaking.

“Just a bit more!!”

Their full strength produced sparks and smoke.

“Push!!”

A harmony of replying shouts sounded like distant thunder.

Suddenly, the people forming the wheel formations on the port and starboard sides felt something.

It was a heat.

However, it was not a blazing heat. It was a cool or chilly presence.

“What is...?”

Before they could finish their question, a wall of water shot up between the wheel formation and the Musashi.

“!?”

Reversed waterfalls jutted upwards at even intervals along the Musashi’s port and starboard sides.

The thick walls of water were likely made by raising the output of and thickening the ocean used for the Musashi's standard cruising. With the sound of spray, the water scattered into the air and the walls forming from the water supply below meant one thing.

“Is this a wall to defend against our wheel formation!?”

Everyone aboard the small ships understood that their shells, bullets, and spells would be greatly weakened as they broke through the rising water. Also, once their power had its trajectory altered, it would cause no damage outside of its weight.

“Fire!!”

They fired, but the wall predicted it and rose up to stop it.

“Did they read the pattern of our wheel formation attack!?”

“Judge. The faster and denser their attacks become, the more gaps in the pattern are filled in.”

Adele wiped sweat from her brow on the bridge and she spoke into a divine transmission sign frame with a tremor in her voice.

“D-defense unit, well done keeping up the defense until we could read their pattern!!”

In all honesty, she had not thought it possible except maybe for her mobile shell, but they had all endured.

She wondered if she had read the situation wrong or if she was overestimating her own ability.

Several walls of water were rising on either side of the Musashi and they were being controlled by the automatons who captained the individual ships. It was a defensive technique, but it had two purposes for the Musashi.

“Cannon unit! The enemy’s attacks are thinnest where the walls aren’t rising, so fire there! Bring an end to their wheel formation! That will bring an end to the Battle of Plymouth which is #1 on the program!”

Also...

“Musashi, ascend!”

It was possible the firing enemy ships would attempt to ram them, so it was dangerous to have them on the same level.

The Musashi would rise.

When using a rotating formation like the wheel formation, it was difficult to respond to movement on the other side. It was doubly so when rotating so quickly, so now that the Musashi had lured them into speeding up so much...

“Once we ascend, expand the outer hull, accelerate with gravitational cruising, and pursue the leading fleet!”

The walls of water gave them stability while ascending, so they could rise more quickly than the enemies on either side.

They were damaged and worn down, but they had made their way to the next stage.

The attack unit reported it was ready, so Adele gave the order.

“Commence attack!!”

As cannon fire arrived between the upside-down waterfall walls, the small ships on either side had no way of evading besides continuing their rotation. They had shields, but most of them were struck by the Musashi's counterattack.

“Defend!!”

But the attacks bent one portion of the rotation and it all fell apart.

“Damn!”

Everyone making up the wheel formation groaned.

“But this formation is supposed to handle both offense and defense!”

The rotation would help them evade and distribute the damage and they could attack continually without end. In an aerial battle, the formation was effective with horizontally firing ships and with overhead bombers. To break it, one had to attack all of the enemies to wear them down or to focus on a single point and break it.

The Musashi had chosen the latter.

The walls of water allowed them to choose their timing and they could carefully aim their cannons because they did not have to worry about defense. Once they were instructed which ship to target, relentless yet awkward concentrated fire was poured onto a few ships within the wheel formation.

“...!!”

Those few ships crumbled. Normally, any damaged ships were to withdraw to the inside of the formation, but they could not manage even that. Further attacks arrived and the crumbling ships shook weakly and lowered.

“Sorry!”

After saying only that, they left by falling.

Soon, the wheel formations were truly destroyed. As a history recreation interpretation, the ship leaving on the port side took on the role of vice-flagship and the damaged ship on the starboard side became the treasury ship.

The silence of the two ships created a gap that could not fire back.

“The next attack is coming!!”

New shellfire slammed into the ships on the edge of the gap and the crews of the small ships noticed the Musashi was beginning to ascend as it switched between offense and defense.

“Wow.”

It looked more like an actual city than a giant building. Smoke rose from it, a few spots on the surface were on fire, and it had holes torn in the sides, but it steadily rose. Meanwhile, everyone on the small ships gulped.

But...

“Don’t let them get away!!” someone shouted as loudly as they could. “Form an angled line! Advance and meet up with the commander for the resupply time!!”

Segundo watched the Musashi accelerate.

It looked small enough to hold in the hand, but it quickly grew large enough to need both arms.

...*Wow.*

He was overwhelmed by an urge to run away, but he somehow managed to hold himself in place.

Fusae and the others really are amazing, he realized. So this is what they attacked.

But he could now tell how they had managed it.

“It was what they were meant to do.”

It had been an attack to show off where Tres España stood. Fear was no reason to give up on that.

In truth, they might very well have been afraid.

“But it isn’t about whether you want to do it or not. It’s about what you need in order to do what must be done.”

What was that called?

Was it courage? But if so, why was a coward like him here now?

“Who can say?”

At any rate, Segundo saw the giant shape approach. It was an intimidating sight, but it was not unharmed. His comrades from twenty-five years ago had attacked it, torn holes in it, and worn it down at least a bit. Its defenses would have been weakened and the external armor and surface would be under stress.

I see, thought Segundo. I may be a coward...

“But I can trust that I don’t waste the courage I’m given, can’t I?”

Where was that which he could not waste?

For an instant, he thought of the woman he had left behind.

“But I was already given it.”

He had been given those latest feelings.

“Everyone, get to your next combat positions!! We are entering the second stage! We will start with the Battle of Portland and shift to the Battle of Calais!!”

The Soho nature district was located north of where the Thames flowed through London.

The business district known as the City was located to its east and the religious and political district of Westminster was to its southwest. The district contained a forest as part of its nature park and hunting grounds.

Someone walked below the sounds in the sky and while hidden below those trees.

Mitotsudaira walked along the dirt path that was filled with darkness and she looked to the city from that forest.

Specifically, she saw the plaza located between Westminster and Soho.

After a few more steps, she spoke without stopping her feet.

“Is the hound not going to pursue my classmates who went on ahead?”

She received no response, but she still smiled.

“Should I take it as a compliment that you find me alone enough of an opponent?”

She shook her head.

“No, you’re taking me too lightly if you think a single hound is enough to take on a wolf. Did my performance last time put you off your guard that much?”

As soon as she said that, lights appeared in the forest.

Hundreds of knife blades spilled from below the leaves of the trees on either side of Mitotsudaira.

“Wars of the Roses.”

The countless lights assaulted Mitotsudaira while slicing through the shadows, trees, branches, and darkness.

Mitotsudaira took action to easily avoid the downpour of blades falling from above.

...Honestly, what a pain.

She raised her arms.

Two chains dangled to the ground from them and continued back into the forest she had walked through. The silver chains sunken into the underbrush got to work in the forest.

“Reveal the enemy, silver chains. Show her that nothing can escape a wolf.”

An instant later, the silver chains that were wrapped around the trees tightened themselves. Accompanied by repeated sounds of snapping and tearing, the trees were felled within a several dozen meter radius.

The forest was cleared away.

The many snapping sounds produced three things.

The forest came into view, the countless blades were stopped by the leaves and branches covering them, and...

“A doll should not hide in the darkness.”

Walsingham was revealed standing motionless where the forest had been.

She split her cross spear and produced two cross swords while the countless blades returned to spiral around her.

Meanwhile, Mitotsudaira found a suitable object among the fallen tree trunks and split it by tightening a silver chain around it. She had formed two thick logs about three meters in length and she grabbed their edges with the silver chains.

“Now, will this be enough if I want to play fetch with a dog?”

She then entered the plaza which contained a fountain surrounded by stone.

This is the same layout as the site of my previous failure, she thought. If I am to report my victory to my king, I must make up for that.

She walked around the fountain and faced her enemy.

With the fountain between them, Walsingham held her cross spear and had the blades hover around her.

Mitotsudaira faced her from a spot in which she could bathe in the moonlight and she looked up into the sky.

“The moons are so beautiful.”

She asked a question of her opponent, but it was a question asking for agreement.

“Don’t you agree? That full moon brings joy to non-humans and automatons are no exception, are they?”

Below the moons, Walsingham faced Mitotsudaira and nodded.

There was a reason non-humans reacted to the moon.

“Did you know? Supposedly, one of the moons has existed since before the Age of the Gods, but the other is said to be a mass of Orei Metallo made from solidified ether that was used to fill a hole opened in the sky. The light of the sun which has circled to the other side of the planet reaches it.”

Walsingham did know.

She quite liked astronomy.

She was the leader of the public morals committee and had a lot of information on other nations. She did so to ensure her hands and her fangs could reach

anywhere, but the Testament descriptions said that information network and scheming had led the queen to avoid the original Walsingham.

However, that was exactly why she loved the stars which were out of her reach.

She had no emotions, but she had determined it was appropriate to say she “loved” them if she thought about them and looked at them despite them being out of reach and beyond understanding.

Meanwhile, the wolf continued speaking.

“The mass of ether reflects the light onto this planet, but it is no longer mere reflected light. It supposedly becomes much like the ley lines that carry ether. And thus non-humans feel their hearts stir when that moon is out.”

That moon was currently overhead and illuminating the two of them.

And as if spurred on by that light, the silver wolf continued speaking.

She stood beyond the stone fountain and turned to face Walsingham.

“I will start by greeting you, but then I will defeat you.”

“Me too,” said Walsingham quickly.

An instant later, Walsingham was certain that she had moved first.

The night of London was filled with many different sounds.

Some were the tones of the naval battle in the southern sky and others were the evidence of the battles occurring somewhere in London.

The harmony reverberated through the buildings of the city. The shaking shutters and groaning stone walls added their own notes to the symphony.

The Thames flowed west to east through the center of London and even it had ripples from the shaking and occasionally shot shallow bursts of spray into the air.

Many eyes watched the river and the bridge crossing it. From the shutters of the houses and apartments along the river, people watched the railing on the northern end of the bridge.

A girl in white leaned against the railing. She had long ears.

Everyone stared at the girl who read a book by moonlight. The city's lights had been extinguished for the blackout, so the people had no entertainment or anything else to distract them from their nerves. They could not leave their houses, so even the races with night vision could only read or play chess with family members who already knew their play style.

However...

"Shakespeare is protecting us with her theatre."

"This is one road removed from the central road, but I hear it's a major fork in the ley lines."

"But look."

The speaking family turned in a certain direction where someone could be seen on the road south of the bridge.

A boy wearing glasses and a Far Eastern uniform arrived near the southern end of the bridge. He had his right sleeve rolled up, so everyone watching could see the bandages wrapped around that arm.

"Macbeth is here. The usurper of the throne is here."

They all nodded and watched the boy stand on the south end of the bridge, but the girl did not look up from her book.

For that reason, the boy opened his mouth and spoke to the girl on the opposite end of the bridge.

“Please end my Macbeth immediately.”

Her silence seemed to ask why, so he continued.

“There’s somewhere I have to go after this.”

Neshinbara saw her stop moving. When reading a book, one’s eyes moved and one prepared to turn the page, but those actions were replaced by a voice.

“You make it sound like I’m keeping you here.”

“If you aren’t, then please end this play.”

“I can’t,” she said from the other end of the slightly rounded bridge. “Macbeth is built into tonight’s play. Your absence has made it continue without Macbeth himself, but that in itself is a kind of theatrical technique. Everyone can use their imagination to make up for a missing lead.”

“Are you sure you want me being the lead?”

“You keep putting words in my mouth.”

Shakespeare looked back to her book, so Neshinbara made a sudden statement.

“Which one are you?”

“Which what?”

“You said yourself that there were two girls who lived in that Tres Españan orphanage with me ten years ago. Which one are you?”

“You don’t know?”

“Judge,” replied Neshinbara. “I don’t. After all, there was only one of you back then. There was only Thomas Shakespeare. Or should I say No. 14 Shakespeare.”

Neshinbara looked at the girl beyond the bridge.

He did not know if she had realized it or not, so he had to check.

“It’s a common thing in people who are abused in their childhood. No, it’s also common among geniuses. You end up with another self inside you. I don’t know if it was someone to shunt your stress onto, someone to speak with, your ideal, or what.”

So...

“No. 14, I don’t know which one you are now.”

Instead...

“What I do know is... No, maybe I don’t know it. I don’t really feel like I know it and I feel kind of bad when I think I do. At any rate, the one I want to be with isn’t you.”

“I think there’s something wrong with simultaneously calling for world domination and world peace.”

That’s because there is, he thought. But there’s also something wrong with you for sympathizing with it.

And perhaps for that reason, she asked a question.

“Why?”

There was a clear answer to that question. It was something he had realized anew after seeing what he had once created. *That place* was comfortable, but more importantly...

“If I’m there, I can create what it is I want to create.”

“But you aren’t creating anything.”

She hit him where it hurt, so he could only smile bitterly and shrug.

“You’re right and I’m sorry. This isn’t something I promised to one or the other. I promised to both of you. We promised we would create something wherever we ended up and, once we grew up, we would use those things to communicate with each other. ...So I’m sorry. I hadn’t forgotten, but...I was afraid. I’d decided for myself that it would no longer get through to anyone even if I did it.”

“It’s fine. I also think it’s silly for a professional to write something to communicate with a specific individual. I’ll write what I want to write and, if everyone who picks it up can enjoy it, I’ll be even happier. That is the better method.”

“Then,” said Neshinbara while raising his right hand. “Please end Macbeth.”

“Why?”

“Because I will write too.”

“Write what?”

He had already decided on that. Or rather, he had decided it without realizing it. He had vaguely realized it during the Battle of Mikawa and this had helped him prepare.

“I will write about the borderline of the world.”

“That’s meaningless. That will most likely not remain in history.”

“Judge. But if I enjoy it, that’s enough. And whether it remains in history or not, if it reaches readers who love books and they enjoy it, that’s all the better. I’ll be a bit depressed if they throw it to the floor, though.”

“A battle of ideals still burns calories, so please spare me that. But...”

But...

“I doubt it will be allowed to remain, but it may be something that still ends up remaining in some other way. Is that the vague borderline you want to reach?”

“It’s the same for you, isn’t it?”

Silence fell over the other end of the moonlit bridge and river, so Neshinbara nodded.

“You feel the pressure of your inherited name and struggle over when you can brag about your skill as an author. For the history recreation, it ends with your name, so there’s no need to create anything original. But even so, you want your name to leave its mark. You stand on that borderline between your inherited name and yourself.”

“Testament. You sure are eloquent.”

“Judge. I’m a horrible guy that loves criticizing others. But I will still continue on.”

“To where?”

“Judge. First, to where you are.”

Shakespeare stopped moving and he felt her gaze on him, so he pointed his right hand at her.

“I too will go to that place where eloquently-phrased criticism washes over me. Unless I go there, the horizon I long for will be nothing but a dream. So I’ll go there. And since it’s still presumptuous of me to call myself a professional, I just need the one reason.”

He took in a breath.

“I will go there to fulfill my promise with the both of you.”

“There’s more, isn’t there?” quietly asked Shakespeare. “If you defeat me, you will take my Logismoï Oplo, won’t you?”

“Judge. To recover my value after my miserable performance, I need to bring a souvenir back from England. But in exchange, you make a demand. If you win, what do you want from me?”

“Testament.” She nodded. “If I win...”

She suddenly shut her book and dropped it into the paper bag next to her. She then pulled the white and black Aspida Phylargia from the bag and spoke quickly.

“You will remain in England and determine which one I am.”

How suddenly she spoke, what she said, and how quickly she said it made Neshinbara think he had misheard and he mentally stumbled.

“Eh? Wait. Wh-what do you mean by that?”

“ ... ”

With her gaze hidden by her thick glasses, she lowered her head a bit and strings of writing spilled from her hair.

Just as he realized he had made a mistake, it arrived.

<<Move, Birnam forest.>>

The army disguised as a forest finally arrived on the battlefield.

<<Go forth and attack Macbeth, army of Birnam.>>

A large wave of battle crossed the bridge over the Thames and crashed into him.

“It sounds like the others are having pretty harsh battles.”

Naruze spoke to Tenzou who ran ahead of her, but he did not reply.

The Technohexen spoke in order to distract them, but the ninja did not play along. She then let out a voice and covered for the ninja.

“_____!”

She threw a bottle of water to the right of an upcoming intersection.

The bottle exploded and the warriors hiding behind the corner prepared their shields, but the two had already passed the intersection by that time. Arrows were fired and an occasional bullet flew their way, but they accelerated and avoided them.

The ninja had a charm set on either shoulder. They were both defensive charms created by Asama that weakened projectiles. They were powerful, but the circular meter on the bottom had already circled about two-thirds of the way around the torii-shaped activation symbol.

Nevertheless, the ninja continued onwards and suddenly spoke.

“Naruze-dono, we are coming up on an upwards slope.”

“Judge. I can see the Tower of London up ahead. You should be happy.”

She used her wings to accelerate and closed the ninja’s slight lead.

“But this has gone surprisingly smoothly considering-...”

She trailed off when she noticed something odd. The meters indicating the remaining power in the charms on Tenzou’s shoulders were draining quickly enough to see. That proved he was being attacked. There did not appear to be anything around, but if he was under some kind of attack...

“Tenzou!! That pillar!!”

Tenzou understood what her tone and words meant.

The two of them charged below the roof of an arcade on the shopping district to the right.

“!?”

The stone and wood roof was destroyed by some kind of overhead attack, but the two of them did not fall back. They continued on through the arcade and up the shallow slope. As they did, some kind of power struck the arcade roof, balconies, and terraces much like footsteps.

“Wh-what is this!?” shouted Tenzou. “It’s just like something from a side-scrolling action game!”

“If so, we can kill the pike units by jumping on top of them. No, this is *that*.”

“Oh, of course. *That*! ...I’m sorry. I got carried away. What is *that*?”

“As long as you understand,” said Naruze as her hand shot out among the overhead destruction.

She found what she was looking for, accelerated with her wings, and held up a broken arrow.

“This is a combination attack from Vice President Cecil’s weight attack and Dudley’s weapon manipulation.” She sighed while racing onward. “That was a close one. They increased the overall weight gradually enough that I mistook it for exhaustion. If I hadn’t seen your charms, I might not have caught on.”

“Then are they behind this attack that’s pursuing us?”

“Judge. We’re running below the arcade, so they switched to putting Cecil’s weight on the arrows fired by Dudley. The two of them must be above us, so you’re going to owe me one.”

“Eh?”

Naruze’s words confused Tenzou, but she only smiled a bit.

“Most likely, Cecil’s weight will return to us once we leave the arcade and she’ll try to crush us. But I’ll forcibly keep most of it from reaching you, so you just

keep running. Got it? I'll take care of things here. I won't be satisfied until I show those two what I can do anyway."

"Are you sure you can handle both of them at once?"

"You just have to carry out the role I've given you." She took a breath. "But this is for my own sake. Everyone in our class really cares about each other, so I'm sure they'll all praise me for this. ...And from time to time, that's not too bad."

"Naruze-dono," muttered Tenzou. "Back in elementary school when we had never even looked each other in the eye, you suddenly looked at me and said, 'Something smells like a dog in here? Is it you?' Back then, I thought you would be a lifelong enemy. To make a long story short, guys really are easy to deceive."

"Oh, sorry. I don't remember that at all. But I do remember I ended up next to you after the seat change in the second term of our third year. I didn't know who you were, so I avoided speaking to you. That was pretty painful."

"Y-you're absolutely horrible!! That second term is what did a wonderful job of traumatizing me into thinking girls hated me! That's why I'm not popular!"

"You like getting worked up over nothing, don't you?"

"And whose fault is that!?"

As they spoke, the roof overhead crumbled and the two of them continued forward.

They had almost reached the top of the slope where a plaza created a break in the arcade.

It was the perfect place to bring the weight down on them.

"That's where the enemy plans to get us, so let's use it to our advantage!!"

Cecil, Dudley, and a line of auto-loading arbalests stood in the plaza atop the hill. As they monitored the enemy's approach, they saw two figures charge out from under the roof of the left arcade.

“Cecil! Crush them!!”

“Going up.”

Cecil floated high into the air and the surrounding landscape grew slightly distorted.

She was adding weight to everything.

Her aim was to crush the two who had just climbed the slope. As they ran from sloped to level land, their postures and their breathing both changed. The great weight would disturb their running and cause them to collapse.

To ensure that happened, Cecil floated up even further.

And...

“_____!!”

The two enemies arrived and they were both colored black.

One was a ninja, the other had black wings and hair, and they both wore black Far Eastern uniforms.

The weight pressed down on them, but the Technohexen opened her mouth.

“Go!!”

Dudley watched as the ninja ran through the plaza without anything weighing him down.

...*What!?*

Wondering how, Dudley looked closely and saw through the trick.

The black-winged Technohexen remained on the other side of the ninja.

She was taking all the weight. Cecil's weight could not be rejected even if it was understood. The target's waist would drop, their body would creak, their feet would stick to the ground, and their speed would drop.

However, she used her arms to hold up an object: her wing.

Her right wing groaned, shook, trembled, and scattered black feathers in the gravity, but it remained over the ninja's head.

Cecil's added weight came from above. If something cut off its path, it would hit that obstruction and not reach what lay below.

"You're using your wing to create a protective roof over the ninja!?"

She could not do so forever because she would eventually be crushed.

But she clenched her teeth and supported the ninja despite being on the verge of collapse.

"Kh!!"

She was successfully protecting her classmate from Cecil's weight.

"H-h-h-h-how forceful!"

"I know," muttered Naruze behind her clenched teeth.

What was this? She groaned, raised her eyebrows, grew flushed, took a bracing stance, and practically crawled along the ground rather than lightly flying through the air.

...How pathetic.

It's disgraceful and nothing about it is worth seeing. And what's with the situation? It makes me think of friendship, trust, solidarity, and other words I don't much care for.

"But this is the best way to get back at those women!"

This pathetic endurance will take this ninja to safety.

After all, I've experienced this weight before and he hasn't. He's a weight virgin, so a weight adult like myself needs to give him a helping hand.

...Honestly, what a terrible role.

But Tenzou, there's something else I remember.

It's true that you've been cautious around me. I know that. It made things easier for me, so I was actually thankful. But whenever we would gather for the school festival or anything else, you may have seen it as your duty, but you would never leave me out when you went to buy things for everyone.

It was probably annoying, but there are times when I need a break or something to drink and I don't want to be left out. I can be selfish, so that's just how I feel.

But you never omitted me.

I'm not the type to forget that.

I'll pay you back five times over. After all, you can't get a girlfriend while running errands all the time. But now that I'm letting you run somewhere other than on an errand, I'm sure you can get a girlfriend.

I'll pay you back five times over, so make sure to pay me back the excess four times later. Yes, up until now was about 12 years, so four times that would be 48 years. All you have to do is go along with my selfish whims and not leave me out for that long.

"Kh!"

Go. The arcade across the plaza is only a few more steps. Is it twenty more? That's a long way. Couldn't it just be ten? Is London trying to mock me here? Ahh, I can't lift my legs anymore. But I still have nineteen, eighteen more... My wing is heavy too! I need to go on a diet. Seventeen, sixteen. Yes, fifteen, when I get back, fourteen, I'll eat something nice with Margot and then get to bed! Thirteen, twelve, eleven... Kwaaaaah! I can't stand straight! Ten... I don't have to worry about the last ten steps, right? Right? Tenzou's already moving on ahead, so it doesn't even- nine... Wait. What am I doing? I need to stretch my wing forward and make up for falling behind, but eight and seven and...ow, ow, ow! My wing is seriously going to break. It's going to dislocate and isn't that supposed make it happen more easily next time!? Oh, honestly. I'm dragging my feet. And I'm falling forward. But making it to six is good enough, isn't it? Margot will praise me for making it this far, won't she? If I make it five...no, four, Margot will let me grope her tonight!

I made it! I made it to three! I'm gonna grope her! Dammit, Tenzou! Get going already!

Two. Just a bit further. One...one...one one one...

Oh, no. The ground is straight ahead. I'm falling. But raise your wing. Only the tip of the wing can reach him, it's only for your own self-satisfaction, and you're probably going to collapse, but...

"Tenzou!!"

Say it and that ninja is sure to carry out your errand.

"A girlfriend! Three minutes!!"

"Judge!"

Idiot. That makes it sound like you're asking him to get you a girlfriend.

...But...

I guess it doesn't matter now.

One.

Dudley saw the ninja dash across the plaza.

“!?”

The Technohexen running with him fell from her low stance and into a roll. She made a complete rotation while her wing groaned under the stress.

However, the ninja continued on. The Technohexen’s wing had barely been reaching him toward the end, but the remaining power in the charms on his shoulders had covered for that.

He cut past Dudley and accelerated into the arcade leading to the Tower of London.

“Sh-sh-sh-shoot him!!”

Arbalest fire pursued the ninja, but he lowered down and accelerated as if crawling along the ground. The arbalest bolts caught up and swept across the area, but they shot over his head. And by the time the second set of bolts had been loaded...

“...!!”

The ninja had already dashed down the street.

“Dudley!?”

Cecil’s cry brought a moment of hesitation, but Dudley did not pursue. She was ashamed to have let him escape, but another member of the Trumps lay ahead. Pursuing an enemy she had let escape would say she did not trust her fellow Trumps or the queen.

“I-I-I-I-I will deal with the opponent I can deal with here!”

Dudley turned toward the collapsed Technohexen. One enemy had escaped, but one had been stopped here. This was not a problem, so she waved toward Cecil.

“C-c-c-crush her, Cecil. And hold her down to r-r-r-r-restrain her.”

Hearing that, the Technohexen stood up while gasping for breath.

“Ha ha. What’s this? Attacking out of spite?”

“Sh-sh-sh-sh-shut up. I already defeated you.”

“No, you made me fall. Don’t get ahead of yourself.”

The Technohexen slowly rose, but Cecil was already pinpointing the weight on her. She gave a small groan and sat back on the ground as if pulled by her wings.

However, she looked over with strength in her gaze.

“I win. Tenzou will definitely carry out his mission.”

“How can you be s-s-s-s-s-so sure!?”

“Because that idiot is a ninja.”

She laughed while placing her arms on the ground to help withstand the weight.

“This is what you get!!”

Now, I’ve said it, thought Naruze with an inward smile.

She had not actually gotten her revenge, but this was good enough. If Margot had heard her, she probably would have scolded her for going too far.

...But this weight really is-

“Eh?”

She suddenly felt as if her body had jumped upwards. The weight had vanished and the arms, back, and wings she had been using to avoid being crushed suddenly regained their freedom. As she wondered what had happened, she heard a voice.

“Oh, dear. Don’t push up from below so suddenly.”

Someone stood above her with their legs straddling her back and wings. She looked up to see who it was.

“Kimi!?”

Why? she wondered in surprise.

“To enjoy the nightlife,” answered the smiling girl.

Dudley gasped at what occurred in front of her. Not only had a girl dressed like a prostitute casually walked up, but...

...She’s taking Cecil’s weight without issue!?

The girl’s hair decorations and skirt were definitely affected by the weight, but the girl herself was light. She swept up the weight on her entire body and faced Dudley with a smile.

Dudley recognized the girl. She was the one who had defeated Honda Tadakatsu’s daughter with a dancing spell during the Battle of Mikawa.

She was a strange girl, but that strange girl faced Dudley and spoke.

“He heh heh. Ball-and-chain woman and balloon woman, you look like you have a question. I will answer anything you ask. But the deadline is one second from now. ...One. That’s it! I won’t answer anything more! Heh heh heh. Now, ask me your question!!”

...I have no idea what she’s saying!?

“Yes, I understand, so I will tell you. Celine! My name today is Celine! After all, my foolish brother made a cheese Doria made with *celery* for dinner last night.”

...Oh, I kind of understood that one! But it was completely pointless!

“W-w-w-w-w-wait a second!”

“Just a second!?”

“W-w-wait at least three seconds!”

“We’ll be here all day at this rate. Then again, it’s already night. ...Is that okay? Oh, it isn’t, is it? How lovely!”

...Wait. Wait, wait, wait. Don’t get caught up in her pace, Robert Dudley. Follow your blood pressure’s example and calm down at a bit above normal. If there’s anything to say here it’s that I can’t believe the other Far Easterners have been able to put up with this!

“B-b-b-but h-how can you ignore Cecil’s weight!?”

“Ha ha. How stupid can you be? Of course I won’t tell the enemy that. ...Wait, Naruze. What kind of look is that for gazing upon a goddess? Gaze upon her with more of a smile. What? You don’t understand either? My god allows makeup and fashion for substitutions, so just by being me, I am not effected by all sorts of spells! But that’s a trade secret!”

...She told us that readily!?

This was dangerous. Dudley could tell this was a dangerous person, but that dangerous person did not stop speaking.

“Now, Naruze, you deal with that skinny woman. Okay? And I will take care of that one getting a nice breath of fresh air.”

“W-w-w-wait! Aren’t you a normal student!? You do not have the right to-...”

“What? In that case, I will continue on to watch that plain ninja plainly fail after he got carried away and ran off. I doubt the warriors up ahead can lay a finger on the summit’s flower. You understand that much, don’t you? You really are stupid. I was lowering myself to your level, so why are you getting carried away? Honestly, this is why humans are so hopeless when they get arrogant! ...All right! That was a pretty good line, wasn’t it!? I pass! Yeah!”

Dudley felt dizzy for a moment.

...Oh, no. And I already have high blood pressure.

Meanwhile, the strange girl helped up the Technohexen.

“Now, if I don’t do anything, the others will come crying here and try to interrupt me when I’m showing off, so let’s get this over with quickly.”

“H-h-h-how dare you say that!?”

“Heh heh heh. Make no mistake. I’m actually in a pretty good mood right now.”

The crazy person said something unbelievable.

“After all, my foolish brother and future sister awkwardly confirmed their dreams in this city. London is a wonderful city. I’m thankful. They both bought me a souvenir and I understand that’s something I could normally never hope to get, so I’ll let you off with a nice beating.”

Even the impertinent Technohexen stared blankly at the dancer whose smile deepened.

“C’mon,” she said while slapping the Technohexen on the butt. “You go over there. I won’t help you, but no hard feelings, okay? If I did help you, my foolish brother would complain and say you could’ve handled it on your own.”

And...

“It looks like the situation in the sky has advanced a stage, so go on ahead to ensure we can advance as well, Malga Naruze. Go and release some of that stress.”

Chapter 54: One who Closes in for a Collision

CHAPTER 54

"One who Closes in for a Collision"



When does
The unexpected happen?
Point Allocation (Outcome)

When does

The unexpected happen?

Point Allocation (Outcome)

Adele sighed on the bridge.

The battlefield was moving. Some of the others would occasionally stop by to greet her and Toori had arrived with Horizon while he distributed the ether outside.

She checked the history recreation program once more.

2: “Second Round off of Portland at Southern England”

Tres España’s fleet forms a defensive formation while England’s fleet pursues and destroys ships one by one.

3: “Resupply Time”

But it is mercilessly interrupted.

They were reaching those stages and they were approximately three thousands meters from the leading fleet they were exchanging shellfire with. That was within range of the ship’s guns.

After completing the current break at this distance, they would move onto #4 of the recreation.

4: “Third Round off of Southeastern England”

Off of Calais on the Far Eastern mainland, England’s fleet crashes eight fire ships into Tres España’s fleet to throw them into confusion.

That would be the third round, but it actually put some restrictions on the Musashi's advance.

After all, the pursuit and destruction in #2 could be dealt with interpretively, so they had already completed it now that they were catching up with their acceleration and firing on them. Tres España's leading fleet had six ships, so Adele had announced the beginning of the resupply time once they had damaged one of those ships.

They would then fire to keep Tres España from resupplying, but "resupplying" meant something a little different here.

...It means letting the other smaller ships catch up.

She felt that was dangerous because she had wanted to attack the leading fleet with fire ships if possible. The leading fleet was made up of at least Kraken-class ships of over 300 meters long, so if they could sink even one of them with fire ships, the rest of the battle would be a lot easier.

However, the smaller ships could sacrifice themselves to the fire ships once they caught up.

"One small ship per fire ship is a bad deal for us. And the smaller ships can put out an incendiary spell more quickly too."

Toori then tilted his head next to her.

"Why are you using incendiary spells? Couldn't you blow them up with an explosive spell? They use those explosions a lot in divine TV dramas and tokusatsu shows, don't they?"

Adele hesitated to answer Toori's question about why to use incendiary spells over explosive ones.

“Um,” she said while deciding what to say. “You see, chancellor, explosive spells aren’t very effective and they’re easy to defend against, so they aren’t used in actual battle very much. They’re only used a lot in divine TV dramas because they look impressive.”

“Really?”

He tilted his head and she nodded while feeling bad for continuing to face forward.

“The most damage from an explosion comes from the shockwave that expands at ultra-high speed away from the center of the explosion. However, those shockwaves can be stopped with the Musashi’s buffering spells and armor. Also, explosions usually use a chemical reaction to obtain the explosion’s expansion speed, but... Didn’t you learn about alchemy during the chemistry classes on expansion and catalysts?”

“Well, during the first class I did the joke where I shout ‘Look at my alchemic expansion! Ahh, just look at all this alchemy!’, so I was thrown out after the first five seconds.”

Adele also recalled the unpleasant memory of the next class when he had shouted ‘Reactionary expansion!’, tried to grope all the girls’ breasts, and was thrown out after the first three seconds.

“Anyway,” she said while trying to find the simplest way to explain it. “Spells overwrite space by making changes to the ether and explosive spells use ether fuel as a catalyst to alter a larger area. It depends on the type of explosion, but most explosive spells are difficult to construct, have unstable activations, and can fail to activate due to insufficient fuel if a defensive spell interferes or weakens them.”

She took a breath.

“With combustion or heat explosive spells, even a weak fire-resistance spell or primary dispel is enough to keep it from activating. The problem is that those defensive spells are in common usage on ships or cities during combat. In Shinto,

the local god can apply a full-area purification for long periods of time, so explosives that are so easily interfered with have a hard time there. England is protected by the spirits, so it's the same."

"Huh? That sounds like the Far East's really strong."

"Shinto has almost no attack power, though. It's so good at defending because it can purify away an opponent's attack power or attack method."

Rather than deflecting an attack, it returned the attack to zero. Adele's vassal training had taught her how to handle different spell attacks and defenses. An opponent using Holy Spells was tough, but you could win once you made it through. An opponent using Shinto spells was soft, but they would not let you through. That was the difference.

"Anyway, they're hard to make, they're activation is unstable, and they're easy to defend against. On top of that, you need to solidify and use up a large amount of ether fuel for a large-scale explosion, so they're just not worth bringing to the battlefield. There are other ways of using them, but for the most part, an incendiary spell that only takes a single charm and lasts a while is chosen over explosive spells that require a lot more preparation and only last an instant. The incendiary spells are easier to use and they're harder to defend against."

"In that case," said Horizon from next to Toori. She sat on a cushion laid out on the floor and she sipped on a cup of tea. "In what situations would one use explosive spells?"

"Judge. For construction, destroying areas you know don't have defensive spells, or for traps. I guess you could also use them to spread out some other spell. Anyway, that's why physical shells and ether cannons are used in actual battle. Spell defenses are too much of a pain to get past. Even ether cannons have a physical shell at the core to ensure their destructive power."

Adele pointed at the eight small transport ships they sent out as fire ships.

"Those are filled with incendiary spells. They do have an explosive spell at the bottom for spreading the flames, but that isn't the primary attack."

Once she finished speaking, she took a breath.

She relaxed once she saw Horizon nodding in understanding more than Toori.

Down below the bridge, she could see Hassan and Ohiroshiki running a cutlet curry stand, but the break would end in another two minutes. She wondered how many people would be powerful enough to finish a whole serving of cutlet curry on the battlefield so quickly.

...Oh, probably only Hassan-kun himself.

She took another breath and a glass was held out from the side.

She looked over and saw “Musashino” holding a tray.

“Adele-sama, here is a drink. Over.”

“Oh, Judge. Thank you. ...What is it?”

To soothe her nervous and dry throat, she chugged the contents of the glass.

“Judge. It is a squid curry to clear your thoughts. Over.”

Adele’s throat clenched up and refused to function, but Horizon accurately described her thoughts.

“This too must smell a lot like puke.”

“H-Horizon! Is it just me or are your word choices getting more slummy lately!?”

...That doesn’t matter. It really doesn’t. Please hit me on the back a bit. I’m definitely going to have to scold Hassan later. Really, really scold him.

As she moved up and down on her chair, the “drink” finally made it to her stomach.

As Toori pulled on Horizon's hand and suggested they go get something else from the food stand, a chime rang to indicate the end of the break. One of the automatons standing in the front of the bridge turned around.

"The enemy has split into three groups. The large ships are in the center while the smaller ships have formed wheel formations on the left and right. The wheel formations have begun to rotate and they are all advancing toward the ocean off Calais. Over."

I get it now, thought Adele. We're headed for Calais, so I was served Calai-mari.

...I-I just made a joke the ice president would make!!

Calm down, Adele. You haven't fallen that low yet.

At any rate, she had to give some instructions.

"If the large ships are in the center, then prepare the fire ships. As soon as we arrive in the ocean off Calais, send the fire ships into those ships!"

As soon as she gave the order, the previous automaton spoke up once more.

"The enemy has sped up! They are advancing toward Calais at full speed! Over!!"

That meant the fire ships had to travel further.

Even if they sent out the fire ships now, Tres España could check their trajectories and arrange themselves accordingly, so Adele gave new orders.

"Please accelerate and prepare the fire ships!!"

"No! Don't go after them, you idiots!!"

The one shouting into the sky was Drake aboard his patrol boat.

He was watching the Musashi pursue Tres España's fleet.

"Why not?" asked Howard with a tilt of his head. "The fire ships spreading confusion through Tres España's fleet is the biggest turning point of the armada battle. That's what forces them to retreat. And it was supposed to be your role, Drake."

"There is that, but this isn't right! Look!"

He brushed a hand through the fur on his neck that was starting to bristle.

"In the history recreation, England is supposed to remain upwind for the entire battle."

His silver fur indicated the wind was blowing from west to east.

"With the setting sun and the westerly wind, the Musashi is upwind, but if you ask me, moving this quickly is the same as throwing away that upwind advantage."

"Are you saying this violates the history recreation?"

"No," said Drake. "Needless to say, we don't have to worry much about the wind with the abilities of our cannons. It shouldn't cause much of a difference, but we still have some tactics that take the direction of the wind into account."

"But what are-..."

Just as the other two were going to ask what those were, the Musashi filled the gap with its acceleration and launched its fire ships. They used eight 50-meter transport ships.

The fire ships resembled long planks as they left the Musashi which had returned to normal cruising. Just like the javelin throw, they rode the motion of the Musashi slowing down.

"Dammit! I knew this wasn't right!! The Lepanto veterans would never use those larger ships as their own!"

Drake took a breath.

“Sailors care about their ships!!”

Everyone on the Musashi saw the leading enemy fleet take a certain action the instant the eight fire ships were fired.

“Hey.”

Someone who had noticed blankly pointed forward.

“Why are their six larger ships approaching us!?”

No, they were not approaching. They had quickly begun to move in reverse while using the Musashi’s acceleration to...

“They’re going to ram us!!”

In that instant, Adele’s shout ran throughout the entirety of the Musashi.

“Everyone, take cover inside the ship!!”

Six and then eight ships were destroyed.

The three hundred meter aerial ships lost control as if they had been thrown, but they still flew right toward the newly-accelerated Musashi as a counterattack.

Due to their size, they appeared to be moving slowly.

“Take cover!!”

The eight transport ships struck them soon after being launched.

They were wrapped in fire as they slammed into the six aerial ships.

However...

“Those six ships are filled with explosive spells and the required catalyst.”

Segundo's voice came from the one ship remaining between the wheel formations. It was a small automatic galley he had transferred to.

“You did a good job keeping it around for so long. I was embarrassed when I heard it was still around twenty-five years later.”

The crew smiled, but Segundo only nodded and faced forward.

At the same time, flowers blossomed in the sky. It started as six flowers and then the eight ships split open like opening buds.

“The fire ships have damaged the Tres Españan fleet.”

Except...

“The explosion was caused by our six ships. We filled them with explosive spells to create large explosive ships.”

As he spoke, the front half of the Musashi was enveloped up by six explosions large enough to swallow up the later ones.

Due to Adele's swift decision, gunners abandoned their cannons and everyone else left their posts to hide within the newly-built shelters located throughout the Musashi.

Warships of several hundred meters had been turned into bombs with large explosive spells, so the damage would cover a large area.

As soon as everyone dove into the pit-shaped shelters prepared on the left, right, and front of the decks, the explosions assaulted the Musashi.

The supersonic shockwave arrived first. The impact of sound enveloped and tore into the front and upper surface of the Musashi and it immediately left scars all the way to almost halfway down the ship.

The Musashi made full use of its buffering spells to repel the blast, but even its spell defenses could not fully withstand the explosions of six ships in such quick succession. The first one struck, the second knocked the spells out of order, and the third pushed through. The fourth, fifth, and sixth finally managed to actually damage the fronts of the Musashi's first and second ships on the port and starboard sides.

The derricks on Shinagawa and Asakusa break and even the torii-shaped gantry cranes tilted when their surfaces shattered like glass. All of the primary armor on the surface was blown away and most of the secondary armor that was carved with the emblems to produce the ocean was exposed.

The ocean vanished, but the ships slipped forward with the resistance gone.

Then came the flames. They only lasted an instant, but the waves of heat scorched the broken upper deck.

The air had vanished from Asakusa and Shinagawa as well as the fronts of Tama and Murayama, but just as that air returned...

“...!”

The crimson flames were lifted up as they raced along and roasted the remains of the cities.

The hot air danced about and, just as it gained a sweet smell, a new wind entered and produced more hot wind.

The wind was powerful. The destruction of the cities danced in the wind and burning pillars and trees flew through the air.

Finally, the wreckage fell. The pieces that had formed three hundred meter ships were all over a dozen meters long.

The front of Musashi had been destroyed by the shockwaves and scorched by the wave of heat, but now the frames and armor of ships crashed loudly into it. Some pieces rolled and some stabbed in, but they all caused destruction.

And it did not end there.

Tres España's large ship had been filled with another spell in addition to the explosive one.

It was a Holy Spell charm that produced light.

It was the most primitive of the Catholic Holy Spells. They could be mass-produced and easily obtained, so they were often used in homes.

However, a great number had been prepared here. The lights filled a large space like a blizzard.

The air carried them into the vacuum formed by the shockwaves.

Finally, the blizzard of light filled a wide area that enveloped the Musashi. The loss of air and rising of heat caused by the flames had created a circulation that sucked the charms in toward the front of the Musashi and then sent them upwards.

After all the destruction, the Musashi was surrounded by lights.

“What is this!?”

Adele stood up from her chair as the quickly dancing light illuminated even the bridge.

She then realized the light was coming from below her feet as well as outside.

The large-scale spell radar display on the floor was filled with white light.

...Don't tell me...

Next to her, “Musashino” grew unsteady on her feet and sat down on the floor. However, Adele could not turn toward her. She could only face forward and focus on what was happening there.

“When spell charms activate, they use ether. Tres España used that fact to create chaff.”

She raised her eyebrows and stared beyond the light.

“We’ve lost our control system that uses the ether-detection spell radar. Most importantly, the automatons have lost their senses, haven’t they!?”

The spell radar system was already completely paralyzed. It was being overloaded by the excessive information, but restarting it would not help until the chaff disappeared.

Also, the massive numbers of spells interfered with each other, so as they were scattered by the wind, they disturbed the ether and produced ether noise.

That noise was affecting the automatons especially badly.

With noise interfering with their shared memory communication, they could not perform their high-speed data processing. They seemed to be having difficulty grasping each other’s locations and they were acting surprised when they spotted another one close by despite how bright the bridge was.

...Wow, they’re kind of cute like this!

No, this is no time to be so calm, she realized. Have I gone insane? This makes me no different from the rest of the class.

...This is dangerous in a lot of different ways.

However, what was she supposed to do?

While the giant flower of flames blossomed in the sky, the curtain rose on a certain stage in London.

It began with a quick greeting-like exchange on a bridge crossing the Thames.

Both Shakespeare and Neshinbara's spells used text. What Neshinbara wrote became fact and Shakespeare created objects from her strings of text.

Due to what they had to write, Shakespeare's texts were longer and Neshinbara's were shorter.

Shakespeare acted first.

<<The army of Birnam continues to appear from between the trees where branch crosses branch.>>

Armored warriors ran through the forest created by her strings of text. To face them and to get things started, Neshinbara wrote a short text.

<Power is wielded like a weapon.>

The wind formed convective motion around his left arm like a shield, but Shakespeare's written description continued.

<<The army of Birnam uses a few units to create its formation.>>

<<The main unit stays back while the castle is attacked from the left and right.>>

<<This shows Macbeth that a great force is attacking.>>

She made additions and corrections to the script she had prepared. That way she could create the script most suited to her opponent.

Meanwhile, Neshinbara had to face her with only his left hand because Macbeth prevented him from using his right arm.

Macbeth had already appeared as a human figure created from strings of text and that figure was clinging to his right arm. It almost seemed to be begging for him to help.

And so Neshinbara worked to write his descriptions using only his left hand. He was forced to keep his texts short and quick.

<The protective power sees the enemy.>

<The enemy is many.>

<But not infinite.>

<The protective power points.> <And speaks.>

<“I can defeat the closest enemy first.”>

<“I can start with one, two...no, three of them.”>

The text was disordered. A whole was only created when the scene before him, his emotions, and the movement in that scene were added in.

“This is what I am seeing and feeling right now and it is what I must do to deal with you.”

Once the two were finally finished with their preparations, they made contact.

Shakespeare’s words came first.

<<Once the army of Birnam catches sight of its hated enemy, a hunting horn sounds loudly.>>

And in response...

<Let’s go.>

Neshinbara moved forward.

On the bridge crossing the moonlit Thames, he did not hesitate to run right into the charging army.

<Power, persist and continue onward.>

<<They all respond to the horn and shout that there are no cowards in the army of Birnam.>>

<Are they coming?>

<<Go forth, army of Macduff. Go forth, army of England which is protected by Prince Malcolm.>>

<But the charging enemy can only arrive from the front.>

<<As the one born by tearing open your mother's stomach, take the usurper's life, spear of Macduff.>>

<The enemy's spears cannot aim higher than the waist.>

<<Charge onward, let out a roar, and expose to the sky the false king who borrowed the prophecy of the Technohexen.>>

<Stay low and...>

<Slip below their spears and stab upwards.>

<<The vanguard comes into contact with Macbeth and the first soldiers are blown away in the instant of contact.>>

<The next group will arrive too soon to do that again.>

<So evade.>

<<But the army has as many soldiers as there are trees in the Birnam Wood and they possess its protection.>>

<Spin yourself around regardless.>

<No matter who the enemy is.>

<Stillness means death.>

<<Continue your charge, army of Birnam. Those arriving now are the skilled soldiers who did not rush forward for their own glory.>>

<Spin around and perform a backhand from low down to the ground.>

<<To ensure their kill, these soldiers pride themselves in their skill and repetition, not in their charging speed.>>

<Knock them upwards.>

<<Even if they are struck once or their comrades are cut down, the experienced soldiers who desire a new king do not falter.>>

<Once the power has risen, swing it back down.>

<Continue.>

<Swing it up and then back down.>

<Spin your body to evade and swing it up once more.>

<If you continue doing that...>

<<The next unit of experienced soldiers leaves the forest and performs a pincer attack from the left and right.>>

<You will be able to cut through to the enemy's main unit.>

<<Oh, I would expect no less of Macbeth. The usurpation of the throne was more than just luck. It was his strength, skill, and undaunted heart that swayed even luck's heart to his side.>>

<Do not let your heart be swayed.>

<Eliminate your hesitation.>

<Crush your pride.>

<You...>

<You are ever a novice.>

Neshinbara's short texts used their speed to cut through Shakespeare's army.

He wrote in order to wield his power and move forward while felling the enemy soldiers one after another.

<Cut through them and do not stop. Keep in constant motion.>

<Power, do not think about showing your form.>

<You are doing what no man must do.>

<Thus, your form is not that of a man.>

<You are something else.>

As if wielding his power in order to learn about her, Neshinbara sent out the words of the swordfight on the bridge. He faced the girl before him and the girl he had once known.

“Michizane, automate the cooling of my left arm.”

He could barely spare even the time spent saying that.

He was no longer using text patterns. He now needed absolute precision. As he faced the approaching army, if a single decision was even slightly out of place, his power would lose its head.

The play's stage had expanded beyond the bridge and reached the city street. He had begun cutting down the soldiers faster than they could be supplied, so the

stage had been expanded to accommodate more space from which the soldiers could appear.

However, Shakespeare's decisions did not end there.

...Is she going to use everything she has?

He occasionally spotted characters other than Macbeth.

Shakespeare's plays were divided between the histories, the comedies, and the tragedies.

Neshinbara remembered that the histories were consistently well received.

The comedies were popular and numerous.

But it was the tragedies that were the most well received.

They were based in history or legend and they told dramas of people going mad with power, love, or hate. The characters were exaggerated yet very human. They were complete characters that a lot of work had gone into.

And there were a lot of them.

The histories in order of writing:

...Henry VI Parts 1-3, Richard III, King John, Richard II, Henry IV parts 1-2, Henry V, and Henry VIII.

The comedies in order of writing:

...The Comedy of Errors, The Taming of the Shrew, The Two Gentlemen of Verona, Love's Labour's Lost, A Midsummer Night's Dream, The Merchant of Venice, Much Ado About Nothing, As You Like It, The Merry Wives of Windsor, Twelfth Night, All's Well That Ends Well, Measure for Measure, Pericles, Cymbeline, The Winter's Tale, the Tempest, and The Two Noble Kinsmen.

And the tragedies in order of writing:

...Titus Andronicus, Romeo and Juliet, Julius Caesar, Hamlet, Troilus and Cressida, Othello, King Lear, Macbeth, Antony and Cleopatra, Coriolanus, and Timon of Athens.

It was a great number of plays and people often knew a lot of the titles even if they did not know what the plays were about. Sanyou-sensei would always go see Julius Caesar when she was going around giving lectures and Antony and Cleopatra was famous for Antony shouting “Is this Rome!?” at the beginning.

However, most of those plays were joining the army now.

Just one look was enough to see people in the army who were clearly heroes.

So...

<Go.>

He had speed and he shortened his texts even further. He precisely reflected the information.

<Cut through.>

<Wield your full power and run.>

The people who lived along the Thames watched the play from beyond their shutters.

The glowing strings of text battled the wind-like manifestation of power.

The strings of text already filled the stone bank of the river, raced across the street, and pulsed through London.

More than just an army was created wherever that road reached.

“All of Shakespeare’s plays are here.”

The histories, comedies, tragedies, and sonnets linked together and gained new power as if dancing.

Anyone who lived in London knew their titles and they began to appear throughout the city.

First, Henry VI, Henry V, Henry IV, the poorly-molded Henry VIII, and Cymbeline, King of Britain, gave their opinions of the changes in England. The Tempest's Duke of Milan and The Winter's Tale's King of Sicily polished their weapons atop an apartment roof while discussing the Age of Exploration with the Merchant of Venice and Much Ado About Nothing's Prince of Aragon.

The Gentlemen of Verona ate on the lawn with the twin brothers and showed off their swords to the noble cousins, but next to them, Katherina the Shrew smiled bitterly at Antonio who was worried about his wife's infidelity. The king of Love's Labour's Lost and his friend were also there asking Katherina for advice.

The famous Caesar was commanding the army along with Titus and Coriolanus. They seemed unbeatable, but the beautiful Othello stood by them holding a thick knife. The undying Troilus was bothered by Hamlet begging to be taught his ability while Timon laughed and patted him on the shoulder.

Fairy King Oberon and the fairies supported the army's spells, but next to them, the youths were debating with Romeo and Juliet whether all really was well that ended well, brought up the phrase measure for measure, and made some jokes about cuckoldry. Pericles, whose beloved had been incestuously taken from him, looked like he wanted to join in, but the crossdressing Rosalind and Viola focused on all of them, including him, while they assisted Oberon.

As Richard III decided it was time to head out to battle, he waved toward the cheers of the women of Windsor. King John's shoulders drooped at his lack of popularity, but Richard II patted him on the back to console him.

They all seemed to be enjoying themselves, but once they entered the battle, they moved as if dancing and spoke.

A single power fought against them all.

At first, it was a boy swinging that power around on the bridge, but as he continually knocked the army from the bridge and into the river, something gradually came into view around him.

The power of his texts that fought and clashed could not be seen, but its movements and the reactions of his surroundings gradually allowed the audience to perceive a form there that did not exist.

That was likely the form of the power he wielded.

It was invisible even to the one who wielded it, but when it struck the army, a depiction of the power and its wielder's form could be felt. It was almost like pressing an invisible mold into clay.

What was its weapon? How tall was it? How long were its arms? Was its hair fluttering behind it as it moved? What clothes was it wearing? Were the legs carrying it around flexible?

The answers to those questions could be perceived and seen.

Meanwhile, the army's form had vanished at some point.

However, it was not gone. The damage to the army was transformed into power by the Logismo Oplo and the various elements gathered together to create a single form.

“Of Shakespeare's masterpieces, this is said to be the greatest of the four great tragedies.”

Everyone in London knew it.

“King Lear!”

Mary saw it from the Tower of London as she changed in preparation to climb up to the Andamio de la Ejecución.

...King Lear!?

That was the story of an elderly king of Britain who was betrayed by two of his three trusted daughters and lost the throne. After losing the throne, he was saved by his youngest daughter, but in the war of restoration, she was captured by the enemy and he was unable to save her. As he held her body, he wailed in grief, went mad, and died.

That tragic king now stood in the city of London and Shakespeare had him intercept something, so Mary began to wonder who the enemy was.

...Has Musashi come here!?

She could not know what their reason was, but someone she knew was coming.

However...

<<Stand, legendary king of Britain. Stand, King Leir who lost his beloved daughter Cordelia and died as he shouted in despair.>>

<<Your powerlessness will be swept away here and you can die while shouting in victory.>>

The intercepting king was powerful as he raised two swords. As he stood, he was old, but...

<<Righteous power and justice are strong. Awaken to that strength, aged king.>>

The king's form slowly changed. The added strings of text made him as strong as the text stated. As if he possessed the emotions and stories of countless historical characters, the strings of text accumulated within him hid his entire body in armor. Soon, he grew even larger than a god of war.

"He's growing above the city," muttered Mary as she took a step back.

Shakespeare's voice then filled London.

“London, this is a combined play that can be viewed from anywhere in England. I hope you enjoy it.”

<<King, wield that power and seek change using that power.>>

The king grew taller than the city’s buildings and continued to grow larger, but another power reacted in kind.

Mary noticed this new power. As the king repeatedly swung down his two swords, another power stood up. It could not be seen, but it continually received the attacks and continually attacked back.

“I can almost see it.”

No, it went beyond that now.

...It’s manifesting!

She could not actually see it, but she could sense it was there.

“This is a substitution, isn’t it!? An author must be facing Shakespeare’s play and that author must be offering his writings to a literary god to receive this power in exchange.”

As soon as she said that, the shutters of all the houses in London shook and voices shouted from within.

“A Far Eastern king is battling our King Lear!!”

Two figures stood up from London.

They seemed to step on the city that was dimly lit by the moons. One was a powerful and elderly king wielding two swords and heavily armored. The other...

“Can you see it?”

It could be seen in the mist and cirrus clouds formed as the night air struck it.

“Were you called here by this literary festival and did you manifest yourself at the hands of a novice writer to gain the intoxication of becoming one with writing? I’m sure this is only a portion of your great power, but I thank you for lending me this form, Tenjin Michizane.”

As Neshinbara spoke from the bridge, the wind took form and that form wore Far Eastern clothes.

It was not human. The appearance of the power had created a giant manifested figure made up of armor. It and King Lear both resembled gods of war, but that may have been the standard way of perceiving a figure that large.

<Tenjin Michizane slowly prepares his weapon at his left hip.>

That weapon was a sword. It was a white lightning sword formed from renku on the topic of lightning. As Michizane prepared, the sound of clanking armor came from around his body and *auspuff* was released. The air gathered between the different parts of the armor was released so he could move more easily.

The Mouse of the same name took the same pose on Neshinbara’s shoulder.

“Michizane, I’ll leave him under your control. Dance in accordance with what I write. This was a good enough situation to call down a god, but if I go too far, Asama-kun will shoot me for exceeding my authority. I’d rather die on tatami mats than this bridge, so let’s get this over with.”

He faced forward and saw the girl standing at Harmonic King Lear’s feet on the other end of the bridge.

They nodded toward each other without even bothering to exchange a glance.

“How about we edit each other’s writing?”

“Testament. I will mercilessly scold you for every mistake. Don’t die. A professional does not let even death stop him from correcting his mistakes.”

“Judge,” he replied just as King Lear raised both arms.

“Now, let the tragedy begin!!”

Chapter 55: Lead Role in the Fire

CHAPTER 55

"Lead Role in the Fire"



If it is thoroughly burned
Beyond the point of nothing remaining
What is created afterwards?

Point Allocation (Continuation)

If it is thoroughly burned

Beyond the point of nothing remaining

What is created afterwards?

Point Allocation (Continuation)

The Musashi burned.

It gave off smoke, holes had been torn into it, the chaff of light Holy Spells kept it from moving, and its speed was dropping.

“That wasn’t really fair, was it?” muttered Segundo.

The flames and smoke did not clear up, but the Musashi slowly broke through them and knocked them away.

Finally, the Musashi appeared without the surface armor or top-level cities on the front half. It was wrapped in light, its secondary armor could not produce its ocean properly, and the front ships looked like they were about to sink.

Segundo watched it as it trailed smoke from various points and the gaps in its armor.

“But this isn’t over yet.” He breathed out a sigh of relief. “When we’re up against such a giant ship, we have no choice but to continue being cowards, so now we’ll be using a truly unfair method.”

He looked up into the sky.

“I can use this as one of the things I’ve gained over the past 25 years, can’t I?”

A color appeared in the distant western sky beyond the Musashi.

The color was white and it flew as if cutting through the sky at high altitude. Ten flying objects were approaching.

“These are reinforcements from the New World.”

Juana looked up at the sky from the retreating fleet moored off the north coast of Tres España.

She watched objects quickly cutting through the sky after being launched from a giant aerial mother ship arriving from the west.

“The mechanical phoenixes of the New World forces!?”

“Testament. Las Casas ordered these ten Rojo Azor here. This is how we will ‘resupply’ for the armada battle.”

The large birds made of metal flew by before the voice over the divine transmission could finish speaking.

They were a type of mechanical beast specialized for aerial combat and their wings were slightly closed. They were not as large as mechanical dragons, but they were still over ten meters long.

After ascending, they dropped toward the cloud of light visible to the east.

The avian silhouettes held long spears below their stomachs.

Those were giant stakes meant to attack fortresses. When the phoenixes’ descent speed was added in, not even fortress walls with defense spells could stand up. No ship’s gun could provide as certain a blow.

Currently, ten of those were thrown during a hit-and-away descent and then ascent.

“!!”

The destructive sound reached even the distant coast.

“Damage to the back! Presumably! Over!!” reported the automaton in charge of the rear portions of the ship.

Adele turned around just in time for a great roar to pass through both sides of the ship.

“Mechanical phoenixes!?”

She could not immediately tell how many there were because the sounds blurred together, but she decided there were ten based on what she saw. After all, there were ten giant holes of destruction on the top levels of Takao and Oume on the rear of the Musashi. It seemed some spear-like objects had been fired into the ship. Some had pierced all the way in while others had not and were lying on their sides.

However, all of the holes were scattering the glowing cloud of ether fuel.

The mechanical phoenixes could be heard disappearing into the sky overhead, but that meant one thing.

...They're going to attack again!

That first attack had likely been to get a feel for how the stakes hit. In order to prevent any optical illusions brought on by how large the Musashi was, they had likely limited themselves to surefire targets. But Adele guessed they would target Musashino or Okutama next.

They really got us here, she thought.

The Musashi had taken a lot of damage. The smoke of ether light was now rising from all of the ships except for Okutama and Musashino and that meant the port and starboard ships would not have their full power.

Also, the automatons were not functioning.

...What am I supposed to do!?

She could not think of anything right away, so she wanted time. She told herself not to panic.

However, Tres España did not end the attack there.

The small ships led by Segundo were coming.

Segundo was finally going in for the attack after taking away the Musashi's front guns, pushing the defenders and attackers into hiding, destroying the surface armor, and then getting in a solid blow on them.

“Are you trying to make this a completely confused battle!?”

Segundo's strategy was obvious. After robbing his opponent of offense, defense, and sight, he would drag them into a confused melee.

His method of doing that was simple. He stretched out the ships as if opening up the wheel formations and then...

“Move the wheel formations in between the Musashi's ships.”

From the inside, the Musashi could not attack horizontally for fear of friendly fire. Also, it worked as a recreation of the confused battle in the Testament descriptions.

“The mechanical phoenix unit will take advantage of the damage to the armor on the outside. If they fire their large stakes into those sides, the Musashi will be unable to expand its outer hull for gravitational acceleration.”

The ten mechanical phoenixes were disappearing into the distant sky, but they would return soon.

I came here to lose, thought Segundo.

Twenty-five years ago, I was unable to accomplish anything beyond surviving. I wasn't able to protect what I needed to protect and yet I was celebrated as a victorious hero. Later, the chancellor gave up his seat for a mere commander like me.

There was a lot I was jealous or resentful of, but none of it could compare to not being allowed to lose. Other people's prejudices were far more human than my disappointment in myself. After all, I had lost everything. There was no point in a prejudice meant to take something from someone.

The previous chancellor gave me a good place to die. Because I didn't know why he chose me, I looked into what kind of person he was, but I still don't know much of anything.

In the end, I have nothing.

I even brushed aside what needed me. But...

“Even if I have nothing, can I still create something?”

The Musashi's front ships pressed in from the left and right as Segundo flew in between them with the others.

At high altitude, the narrow space between the Musashi's ships was filled with turbulence.

“But we originally fought in the Inland Sea. The Lepanto was the same, so we're used to this kind of battlefield. As long as we keep an eye on the towing belts, we can shoot to our heart's content while ignoring an enemy that's afraid of friendly fire. Of course, I'm sure Musashi will think up something.”

He smiled bitterly.

“But we're just as determined, Musashi, so we'll make sure you go along with us. Now, which one of us will be crushed first in this retreating battle?”

He advanced the ship through the Musashi's ships as if they were canyon walls and he raised his right hand into the light-filled night sky.

“How about we begin where we left off 25 years ago? How much can we satisfy ourselves by crushing each other on this trip around England?”

He swung down his hand.

“Commence firing!!”

A rotation of random firing to the left and right exploded between the Musashi's ships.

As the Musashi fought in the southern sky and Musashi's representatives fought in London, Masazumi was caught up in her own battle.

On the transport ship, she had to fight back against a group of primarily skeletal Living Dead warriors.

White bones had already filled the deck starting from the bottom and the battlefield had moved inside.

“Waaaah! Why is this turning into a cheap Noh horror play!?”

They were currently at war with England. Even if she was not killed, they would still lose her authority as vice president if she were captured. That would prevent them from making peace and ending the war with England.

She wanted to avoid that at all costs, so she made use of the harpoons they had used for fishing and the firearms prepared for defense.

...F-fighting in a narrow corridor is the standard tactic, right!?

She had smashed to pieces quite a few of the group closing in on her. They moved slowly because they had to move their muscle-less bones with only their spiritual body. However, the worst part was what they were all saying.

“Girl, will you let me rest in peace!?”

“From that, I take it Lord Chancellor Hatton is manipulating all of you!!”

“Manipulating? That kind of accusation gives me a deadly heartache! I am only forcing them to do this in exchange for letting them rest in peace!!”

“That’s called manipulating them!!”

However, yelling would not improve the situation. She rolled a barrel to crush them, pinned them in a door, and handed them a bottomless ladle when asked for one from the window.

“That last one had was no friend or fiend of mine!” insisted Hatton.

“But you being here is what called them here!! Leave! Leave right now!! I didn’t call for you!!”

“Why are you so opposed to dying!?”

How philosophical! she thought while throwing desks and chairs to smash the skeletons.

Each time one was crushed, a message would appear in the air saying “Anglican Church Rest in Peace Combo 1-2-1 Hit! Thank you for your cooperation.” That made her wonder if this counted as charitable work.

But the thrown knife that grazed the side of her hair made her rethink that position.

“H-hey! You can use weapons!? We don’t exactly have the same kill ratio here!”

“I am deadly serious about tolerance when it comes to people’s private lives!”

...Does that mean I’m the intolerant one!? Does it!?

At any rate, her situation was very, very bad. There was something she had to say if Tenzou's confession was a success, but it had been a mistake to stay behind for that.

...Oh, but sending a letter or saying it later would make it less meaningful.

She had to say it no matter what, but the corridor was full to capacity.

The skeletons held rusted daggers at their waists and arrived in ranks of three.

“Go to hell!! Go to Naraka!!”

“Are you sure you're Anglican!?”

She kicked over a desk she had dragged from a side room and it pierced through to give her six hits. Meanwhile, she tried to pull her handheld shrine from her pocket binder.

“Huh? I-it's gone?”

There was a hole at the bottom. One of the thrown knives must have torn it because her hand came out the other end of the pocket. *Oh, no*, she thought as Hatton spoke in front of her.

“Oh? You seem to have dropped something. It's so sad. This divine mail address book is a complete graveyard!”

“Don't look at that!! Aren't you supposed to be the Lord Chancellor!?”

“Yesssss! With equity, there's no problem!”

She threw a chair, but he floated right to dodge it. However, she heard a sound of destruction behind him and earned two more hits.

Unfortunately, the enemy already had reinforcements coming. They formed ranks and advanced like a wall and Masazumi realized there was nothing nearby with which to make an impromptu weapon.

“I need to get to the lower corridor!”

Her only choice was to continue on as far as she could while trying to endure. If she managed that, her classmates would come running once they finished their battles. Or so she hoped. She also suspected those horrible people would completely forget about her and leave.

...S-stay positive!! You have to stay positive!!

Once she reached the lower level, she tackled open the door.

And the other side was already filled with skeletons.

...Huh?

As Masazumi tilted her head toward the skeletons that had somehow circled around ahead of her, they lightly raised their hands.

“Good evening, Miss Honda.”

“Good evening,” she replied without thinking.

But then...

“H-how did you get here ahead of me!?”

All of the skeletons raised their arms and what their white hands held.

“The Living Dead are allowed axes, saws, and spell chainsaws!” explained Hatton. “And it’s a ghoulish legacy of the Living Dead to show up ahead of you when you try to escape!”

“I hate B movies!!” she shouted.

However, she was quickly captured.

Several of them held her arms and legs to the floor and they all turned toward Hatton.

“Teacher! One please!!”

“H-hey! What kind of joke is this!?”

Hatton ignored her protests, nodded, and used both hands to hold up the giant dictionary on his waist.

“Now, it is time for death by bludgeoning!”

Those words, the way he held the book as if praying, and how she was held down led Masazumi to shout out.

“This is just wrong!”

A small form awoke in a dimly-lit room.

It was a young anteater Mouse. It had a nest of healing charms inside a short wooden box on the floor and it looked around from the center of it. It wondered why it had woken up.

However, its upturned vision suddenly shook. Something was shaking the floor from somewhere in the distance. Occasionally, it saw glowing objects scattered outside the window and heard people shouting.

“...?”

It wondered what was happening and felt scared.

Until recently, it had been with its mother. No matter what had happened, I had been able to hide by sinking into its mother’s fur and body heat. However, it could no longer do that. It had thought it could hide in that hard point part, but even that had become a dangerous place of damage and injury.

Why was no one protecting it?

It let out a cry in hope of an answer. It could do nothing more than that.

However...

“ ... ”

No reply came.

The anteater looked around the area. The dimly-lit area was in the third basement of Okutama which was directly below Musashi Ariadust Academy. It was an agricultural area where selective breeding was researched. The anteater was inside the office there.

As a Mouse, it had knowledge of the area belonging to its registered shrine, but it did not know why it was here. It assumed it had been thrown out.

However, it relaxed when it saw food placed next to the nest. It decided to lick the small translucent green solid and then go back to sleep. It may have been thrown out and its food might run out, but it would eventually disappear all the same if its surroundings were so dangerous. Simply closing its eyes would be easier.

And so the anteater licked the food, took a breath, stretched a bit, and then realized something.

A sign frame was floating above its head.

The young anteater saw a notification that its supposed owner was in danger.

She was very far away. Based on the divine network connection, she was in a land under the jurisdiction of another academy. Even if their divine transmissions were currently shared, there was a large gap between the Musashi and England.

It could not travel there easily.

Also, its owner was in danger, so if it went there now, it too would be in danger.

However, its owner was in a confrontation between academy representatives.

That meant no one else could help even if she was in danger. The only one who could was the anteater that counted as her possession.

But going would mean getting injured, so it decided it did not have to go and returned to the nest.

Sleeping and allowing its injury to heal was important. Its mother might even return.

If its supposed owner was gone, its ownership would become uncertain and it might even be able to return to its mother.

With that hope in mind, the anteater curled up in the nest.

It decided it did not care if she disappeared.

“ ... ”

But then it slowly observed its surroundings.

It had a nest made of healing charms, it had food, and it had a box to designate its own space.

Most likely, its master had felt differently. She must have felt she would care if the anteater disappeared.

And so the anteater changed its mind about whether it would care if she disappeared.

However, it did not know what to do, so it tried looking outside. It would see if it was dangerous outside and then think about what to do.

Its owner did not want it to disappear, so if it was dangerous outside, staying put would be the best option.

The office door was cracked open, so the anteater left the nest, passed between boxes of bulbs, and slipped through the door labelled “King of Musashi’s Agricultural Laboratory – KoMA Lab”.

Once outside, it found a scene of destruction.

The young anteater was supposedly underground, but the ceiling was split open diagonally and a giant stake had torn up the floor into the lower levels. The light it had seen out the window came from the glowing charms entering through the hole in the ceiling.

The farm had been broken and bent and a few of the thick pillar-like research facilities forming an alternating line with the farmland were spewing flames and smoke. People were running around putting out the fires and plenty of shouting could be heard.

This place was dangerous.

The anteater understood that nowhere was safe anymore.

And so it decided to return to the room, but it was stopped by a sudden voice from the side.

“Masazumi?”

It recognized that as its master’s name, but who was calling her name? The words were formed with thought speech, so it could have been a Mouse. If so, the anteater could leave this to them, so it turned around.

“Masazumi? Not her?”

A brown algae creature crawled out of the farm’s ditch.

The anteater knew of the brown algae creatures due to the information inside it, but the creature would not know it. So how had it made the link between the anteater and its master’s name?

“Bandage. Masazumi’s smell.”

Hearing that, the anteater looked at itself. A healing spell bandage was wrapped around its neck where it had been injured, but it was not tight enough to strangle it.

Its master’s smell came from there.

It then realized something: from the time it had been asleep to now, its master had been trying to protect it.

It had indeed been injured. That had hurt and it had been scary. However, its mother had not been the one to hold it in her hands back then.

“Masazumi.” The brown algae creature tilted its head a bit. “Masazumi in trouble?”

The anteater looked at the sign frame overhead and nodded. At that point, it finally turned its thoughts in a certain direction.

...What am I supposed to do?

That question came from a desire to resolve the difficult situation it was faced with. For the inexperienced Mouse, that activated its help functionality.

“Top recommendation! If the conditions are right, you can travel between ley lines.

“Even with a great distance between Mouse and master, as long as they are on a shared divine network, the Mouse can turn to ether, travel along the network, and recompose itself at its master’s location. This is the same system used to transport the Mouse in when the contract is made, but when it is carried out between Mouse and master, the Mouse needs to recognize its master. Otherwise, it will be unable to recompose. That could mean appearing elsewhere or having a distributed recomposition that, in the worst case, could mean losing the Mouse. As such, a Mouse with an intimate bond is needed.”

The anteater knew it was impossible. Not only was its bond with its master weak, but it did not even remember what its master looked like. That was due to its habit of curling up and hiding.

It could not save its master.

However...

“Don’t know Masazumi?” asked the algae creature.

The anteater nodded.

It did not know and that fact would mean losing her. Not knowing scared it, but there was nothing it could do. This was what it had wanted. Its choices would lead to the death of the master who had not wanted it to die.

Suddenly, the number of algae creatures grew. A second appeared, a third, and they continued to multiply.

“We know.”

The anteater looked up in surprise as the algae creatures swayed and spoke.

“Teach you Masazumi.” “Save Masazumi.” “Friend.”

Asama watched the scene.

A sort of meeting was being held in an obscure ditch next to the KoMA Lab building. The meeting was between Masazumi’s Mouse and some brown algae creatures. The algae creatures were telling the Mouse about Masazumi.

“Masazumi is politician.” “Loves taxes.” “Skinny.”

Asama was unsure about that description, but the young anteater was listening carefully.

Why it would do so was obvious.

...To travel through the ley lines.

Asama had received the notification, so she knew Masazumi was in danger. That was her right as the contract manager. She had reported it to the student council and chancellor's officers, but everyone on the Musashi and in England had their hands full and Masazumi still had a job to do.

...She said she has an announcement to make if Tenzou-kun manages to confess to Mary.

To maintain the right to make such an announcement, she could not lose this battle between representatives. That meant no one could go to help even if they wanted to.

However, a Mouse was different. Asama had run here in order to give the anteater some spells and have someone carry it to Masazumi.

“But I never thought the Mouse would try to go on its own.”

She wondered if she should stop it, but the half-dragon that loved porn games and could fly was gone and Naito was out on the battlefield. She could always load it into a transport arrow and shoot it there, but she would be forced to set Masazumi as the tracking target and she was worried what would happen if she scored a clean hit. And that was almost guaranteed to happen.

However, the anteater Mouse was using a sign frame to set up the ley line travel while watching the algae creatures use water to draw their version of Masazumi's face on the ground. Occasionally, the anteater would use its front paws to touch the bandage around its neck as if to make sure it was there.

...Keep at it.

Ley line travel was often used inside the Musashi and it was a simple process. Most of the time, it was used when the Mouse had gotten lost or had finished an errand it could settle on its own.

However, things were different when battlefield airspace lay in the middle and the end point was on another academy's land.

Nevertheless, Masazumi's Mouse awkwardly but carefully set everything up.

It set it all up correctly, so it would succeed as long as it could recognize her.

If possible, Asama would have liked to test it out in Musashi beforehand.

“...”

But the young anteater finished setting everything up and the sign frame indicated that there were no problems with the setup. It now came down to how well the Mouse could recognize its master. Asama was most worried about this part, but the algae creatures spoke up once more.

“Forgot.”

There was something they had forgotten to mention.

“Makes bad jokes.”

...That new information should do it!

An instant later, the Mouse sank down and its fur bristled.

“...!!”

It turned to light, vanished, and flew through the air.

Adele looked at the model of the Musashi floating in front of her.

The Musashi was currently being shelled by the small Tres Españan ships positioned between the center ships and the port and starboard ships.

The front ships on either side had lost almost all their surface armor, been hit by the mechanical phoenixes, and now were being targeted from extreme close range.

This couldn't get much worse, thought Adele while her mind was almost entirely blank.

She could hear the sounds and feel the shaking, but the control automatons had lost most of their senses due to the Holy Spell chaff. The only sign of the damage being done was on the ether light model of the Musashi. The color red was filling both sides of the central ships and the inner sides of the port and starboard ships. Several overlapping sign frames gave the details of the damage.

...This is bad.

She wondered what to do while watching the model that was occasionally wrapped in static.

However, she had wondered the same thing several times already and nothing had changed.

She had simply been thinking “what should I do” again and again.

She found no answer and something seemed to give the finishing blow.

“Ah.”

The sounds of shellfire on either side grew to a complete barrage.

The wheel formations in between the ships had perfected their movement.

When doing it on the outer sides of the ships earlier, the automatons' reactions and calculations had let them create the defensive water barriers.

However, that was no longer an option. Not even the gravity barriers were working.

“Ah!”

Beyond the light of the scattering Holy Spell charms, a roar and white smoke rose from Murayama's starboard side.

The upper part of the hull had been breached and ether fuel was scattering into the air.

“...!!”

Segundo heard cheers rising into the sky.

The Tres Españan ships were firing while flying back and forth in the narrow space between Musashi's ships.

They were receiving return fire from the decks of those ships, but it was a desperate attempt that the gunners on the scene had decided on.

Fortunately, it was sporadic and their aim was off. Even if they got a few lucky hits, it was not enough to create the continuous barrage needed to wear down the Tres Españans.

The Musashi had stopped. It was still moving forward, but it was entirely on inertia.

That was thanks to the Holy Spell chaff eliminating the shared memory of the automatons in control. The ships could be controlled manually, but they had no way to coordinate the movements of those giant ships. Without proper inter-ship communication, any careless movement could lead to a collision, so the Musashi had to remain motionless.

But, thought Segundo. Our attack will not work forever.

Their wheel formation was only effective as long as the Musashi could not move and the automatons were not functioning. Once the wind carried the chaff out of range, the Tres Españan ships would be surrounded.

That meant they had to destroy the Musashi before that happened.

He looked at the chaff floating around the Musashi and checked on their own pace.

...Can we make it in time?

While he asked the question, a shouting and praying voice filled his heart: please make it in time.

The chaff would most likely last for more than half an hour. Since the Musashi was not moving, the chaff would fall on it and the chaff's effects would continue.

The voice in his heart told him they could make it given that much time.

...Can I really trust in that?

He thought with the sounds of shellfire filling his ears. He held those words of victory in his heart while also wondering if he was allowed such an action.

However...

“...!!”

He heard another cheer. The upper armor of Tama, the second starboard ship, had broken and it was spewing ether light smoke.

A moment later, someone spoke to Segundo.

“We can win this, commander!!”

“Yeah,” said something else.

“Testament,” shouted yet another person. “Let's win this, commander!!”

That shout produced another cheer that seemed to accelerate the sounds of shellfire.

Among those resounding voices, Segundo nodded while trembling a little. Even that small action produced voices of expectation from the others.

“Let’s win this.”

He did not know if he could trust what he himself was saying, but...

...Part of why I’m doing this is so I can trust in it.

He uttered the words hidden deep in his heart.

“Let’s win this, everyone!!”

Adele stood up from her seat as the enemy shellfire further intensified.

All of the automatons around her had fallen to their knees and did not look up toward her.

She merely watched the light of the cannon fire in the sky before her while the inner hull of the Musashi model grew red. However, she could not think of anything she could do.

“...!”

Below her raised eyebrows, something fell down her cheek from the eyes behind her glasses.

...Ah.

I can’t, she thought. I’m the commander, so I can’t give up.

However, she could not contact any of the other ships properly and the firing continued as if ignoring everyone on the Musashi.

“!?”

With more rumbling and shaking, even more smoke filled the air.

It was breaking. It was falling apart and no one could do anything about it. They could only wait until there was actually something they could do.

...Is it all over?

But just as she had that thought, she heard the door behind her open. She turned around and found a certain person standing in the open door.

“Chancellor!?”

A naked boy stood there. Not only that, he posed with his arms spread in a Y-shape and he let out a shout.

“It’s all overrrrrr!!”

“Nwaaah! The chancellor is here to fan the flames!!”

Hearing Adele’s protest, the naked boy redid his pose and shouted again.

“What? Don’t be stupid! Look at reality for a second! We’re done for, Adele!! The Musashi is toast!! Giving up’s our only option! Okay, Big Bro Toori will help you figure out whose fault this is! Oh, but it can’t be me! That’s the rule!”

“Um, chancellor, Vicereine Horizon is behind you.”

“What?”

A moment later, everyone aboard the Musashino felt a strange lurch.

Adele watched the naked boy return through the hole broken in the bridge’s left wall.

...How can he act the same as normal?

Nevertheless, the idiot came toward her while the shaking of shellfire continued.

“How about it, Adele?”

“What?”

“Don’t give me that. Try looking at reality for a second.”

She saw him pointing into the northwestern sky.

She saw England and London on its second level, but there was something new visible in London.

It was something large enough to see even from this distance.

...A giant?

It wore Western armor, wielded two swords, and it was fighting something she could not quite see. Based on the movements of the swords, its opponent seemed to be an equally large giant.

“It looks like an idiot escalated things to that level.”

She knew that Neshinbara was likely controlling the giant she could not see.

Sugawara no Michizane was a god of literature and learning, but he had originally been a noble whose grudge brought a cruel curse to the Far East after being demoted in a government scheme. His anger had been quelled by deifying him, but he was known for a certain ability.

“Lightning.”

He occasionally fired sword-like bolts of lightning that tore into whatever it was Shakespeare had created.

At the moment, one of Adele’s classmates was exchanging swift sword strikes with one of England’s greatest authors. In fact, several more of her classmates were also in that city. And...

“You fit right in as a classmate of that kind of idiot. After all...” The chancellor pointed from London to their current location. “You’ve made it past the halfway point of the armada battle. You’re the one that did that. Adele, you’ve kept us going through half of an important piece of history. I couldn’t do that, but you did. So...”

So...

“Let’s try to keep history going a little longer.”

A few thoughts filled Adele’s mind: *I can’t* or *Please spare me*.

All she could hear were the din of shellfire and destruction that sounded like a quickly ringing bell. Ether smoke had started to rise from every part of the Musashi as if making the sky cry.

However, the idiot spoke clearly.

“Now that you’ve made it halfway, the rest has got to be a piece of cake, right? After all, the rest just gets smaller from here on.”

“Just gets smaller?”

She wanted to say “we’re not talking about a literal piece of cake here”, but then she realized something.

She had regained the calm needed to think things like that.

...*Honestly*.

She still did not know what she had to do, but...

“Don’t worry, chancellor,” she said. “Everyone is doing what they can, so I can keep going too.”

I just said it, didn't I!? she realized in silent shock. I didn't realize I was so ambitious.

However, the automatons were shaking their heads and beginning to reboot from their motionless state on the floor.

...I may not know how to fix this situation, but...

“You know what to do at times like this, don't you?”

“Judge,” agreed Adele before opening a sign frame, taking a breath, and shouting loudly at everyone else. “Someone please hellllllllp!!”

Adele's shout brought someone back to her senses: “Musashino”.

She had been sitting on the floor next to Adele, but the girl's desire for help had completed the reboot of her consciousness. Helping people was at the core of all automatons and it controlled their entire being even without their shared memory.

And upon waking up, “Musashino” realized something.

...The ship isn't shaking?

The sounds of impact, sparks, and smoke were still occurring outside, but the Musashi was no longer shaking. She wondered why.

“The transport ships!? Over.”

As Segundo's fleet fired, they saw a sudden barrier.

It was made up of the Musashi's transport ships which had appeared while flying along the perimeter of the Musashi's ships.

They were pulled in a line by the towing belts to act as shields, but they were no normal transport ships. They all had colorful emblems drawn on their sides.

“Are these the transport ships belonging to Musashi’s most powerful merchants!?”

To avoid losses due to piracy or battles, the large transport ships had excellent defensive capabilities.

The several dozen ships formed walls that shielded the inner sides of the Musashi.

On the bridge, Adele watched the scene with “Musashino” standing by her side.

“Those are the transport ships of Musashi’s mercantile guild.”

They were taking shells and their armor was being blasted off, but they were protecting the Musashi.

All of those ships had been loaded with the Musashi’s cargo and towed on the outside, but they were now forming a defensive wall. A staticky sign frame video then appeared next to Adele’s face.

The audio was also staticky, but she recognized her friend’s voice.

“Adele!? It’s Heidi! We had the higher ups take action!! So...so don’t worry!!”

She sounded out of breath.

“We’ll protect you with the power of money!!”

In an underground long block of the Musashino, the members of the mercantile guild viewed the scene outside through a sign frame.

“Waaaah!! My transport ship! I had money hidden on there to avoid taxes!!”

“Aren’t you being a little too honest? ...Wait! Is that my ship!?”

Shirojiro spoke from the elevator lift in the center of the low-ceilinged long block.

“This is quite a problem. For some reason, the towing belts pulling everyone’s transport ships have been deployed.”

“Damn you!!”

“Oh, what’s this? You are the ones who said staying behind is the best way to get information on Musashi and another nations’ firepower. And you agreed to turn over your cargo ships as a participation fee. The way you continued loading them with your trade cargo right up we left port shows how wonderful a mercantile spirit you possess.”

They could all hear the sounds of holes being torn in the hulls of the transport ships. They listened to the continuous sound of their goods and money being destroyed and one of them raised his eyebrows and spoke.

“What do you want!?”

“A good question.” Shirojiro faced the line of thirty merchants. “I am currently in charge of managing the industrial goods on the battlefield. Let us do business while keeping that in mind. We can start with the right to use defensive spells. If you purchase that right, your transport ships will no longer take direct hits from the enemy shells. Instead, they can be defended with spells.”

All of their faces stiffened at that. Simply buying that was not enough for a perfect defense.

“Judge. As a special service, the first three will receive their defensive spells for free. Now, what will you do? To be clear, I will withdraw a transport ship once the total losses – including these expenses – exceed sixty percent of the ship’s value.”

Now...

“Who does not want to throw their ship away?”

“Adele! You handle things there!!”

Adele understood what Heidi meant.

This was Adele’s post. And as if to cheer her up, the others scattered across the ship had sent quick divine texts with their ideas on resolving their individual situations. While “Musashino” manually organized them, Adele took out a few useful ones and sent back simple replies.

...I may not know what to do right now...

The automatons’ shared memory was unusable, so they had essentially lost all their senses.

“But we might be able to pull through.”

No, she thought while turning toward the chancellor and vicereine behind her.

“Making sure we do is my duty here, isn’t it?”

Musashi King Yoshinao nodded twice in front of the hatch to the bridge.

After making sure there was no one around, he nonchalantly walked on as if he had simply been passing by.

“I thought she might need some advice, but I should have expected this of the girl who bears the wild beast emblem of my territory.”

But then he suddenly stopped walking. He heard a certain sound. It was a long, continuous ripping sound and he knew it by heart despite only having heard it once before.

He opened a sign frame and used his authority as King of Musashi to notify the entire ship.

“The ten mechanical phoenixes are approaching from the starboard side!!”

“What? We, why’re you making things up? Are you that starved for attention? You sure are lonely.”

“I am not making it up, you fool!!”

He saw white lines in the night sky and they were moving directly toward the Musashi’s starboard side.

The ten mechanical phoenixes approaching the Musashi’s starboard side briefly ascended in the light-filled night sky.

They were prepared to fire the large stakes positioned below them in the instant their rising trajectory lessened.

But something happened just before they completed their approach.

“!?”

The two leading phoenixes strayed from their course.

The others barely had time to wonder why when the reason passed by.

Technohexen. A few groups of them wore Technohexen outfits that looked especially black even in the night and they flew through the sky on brooms that could transform into cannons.

“Has Musashi’s aerial spell unit joined the confused battle in the sky!?”

The small number of Technohexen rose through the aerial battlefield and used acceleration spells to provide high-pressure acceleration to coin bullets. A few of them would work together to strengthen the acceleration of a single bullet and carefully aim it as an anti-air gun.

Musashi still did not have air superiority, so the Technohexen scattered as soon as they fired.

They had already passed by the mechanical phoenixes, so they could not fire again. However, the two phoenixes they had hit were in danger.

The damage to them was light and it was not enough to shoot them down, but they had reflexively taken evasive action and their vision had been briefly taken because the shots had targeted the cockpit windshield.

“Kh...Ah!”

The Musashi’s great size threw off those two pilots’ sense of distance, so their wings clipped the starboard deck as they passed by.

The hit sent their bird-like forms into a horizontal spin much like a shuriken. They hopped up, air resistance hit the craft from both the top and bottom, and they were knocked away as if twisting their bodies.

One of them slammed into the deck on the opposite side and broke apart after tossing the pilot into the air. As for the other...

“Fire!!”

A quickly-gathered attack unit poured anti-air fire on it from the ship.

The phoenix was struck from below and twisted upwards for an instant.

“...!”

It too exploded after the pilot managed to eject.

Despite the continued sounds of destruction, those on the Musashi did not have time to celebrate. The other eight had already fired their stakes.

“Tear into the enemy!!”

A single voice replied to that anger-filled shout. It was a staticky voice.

“All automatons, reboot in self-contained mode!”

The scolding tone came from “Musashi”.

That was the first time Suzu had heard “Musashi” speak like that.

...Does she need that...even without emotions?

“Musashi” already had her arms held out as if to play a keyboard, but she was facing a wall-type sign frame. It most likely showed the scene outside and the stakes fired by the mechanical phoenixes.

As Suzu observed it with her senses, “Musashi” faced it and spoke.

“Everyone, rely only on your intrinsic sense devices and only remote connect to devices that allow private connections! If you retain your individuality in self-contained mode, the excess external information should not cause any problems. Do what you can on your own and only communicate via divine transmission or mouth rather than via shared memory! Also, I may be working manually and through a private visual connection...”

Suzu listened to the automaton’s announcement.

“But I will reactivate the gravity barriers!! Over!!”

Of the eight large stakes, four were deflected into the sky.

This was thanks to the gravity barriers. “Musashi” was visually confirming their location from near the bridge, so their location had been a little off. However, she had placed multiple barriers together to just barely catch that many.

Unfortunately, she did not reach three of them in time and one was only slightly diverted from its original target.

Three were on course for a direct hit and one was on a deflected course. After confirming that, the crews of the mechanical phoenixes let out a shout.

“Testament!!”

But a moment later, several people appeared on the outer edge of the Musashino. They were the members of Musashi’s mercantile guild. Their movements were frantic, but they all struck poses.

“Merchant hatches...open!!”

Next, the starboard hulls of the Musashi’s starboard ships literally opened. Double-layer door side hatches making up a portion of the outer hull opened up and down. Those hatches were used as external transport entrances, but they also contained...

“The long block transport routes that extend horizontally through the ships!”

With that shout from the merchants, the long block transport route hatches fully opened and giant passageways extending all the way through the Musashi were formed.

There were four of them. Three swallowed up their stakes in an instant while the other took in the deflected shot at an angle.

“Pass through!!”

The automatons inside the passageways answered that shout with their actions.

To ensure the large stakes passed through into the sky on the opposite side, they used their gravitational control to move objects out of the way or picked up and

ran away with any cats or dogs they found. And if the trajectory of the stakes ever deviated...

“Maid receeeeeeive!!”

Several of them would correct its path.

“Goodbye!!”

All four of them were sent out the transport hatches opened in the armor on the opposite side.

And on that port side were the small Tres Españan ships forming a wheel formation between the Musashi's ships. From their point of view, the Musashi's starboard ships suddenly opened their armor and destructive stakes were launched from the hole.

“!?”

A few of the ships were hit and blown away.

This was friendly fire.

And as the mechanical phoenixes creaked and groaned in their rapid ascent, they were attacked.

It came from the giant forms standing atop Takao, the third starboard ship. The work gods of war there had started to repair the city, but...

“If you don't need this, then take it with you!!”

A large stake pulled from the city was thrown into the belly of the rising phoenixes.

They were riding the wind to ascend even further, so the long attack thrown right in front of them was nearly impossible to avoid. Six of the eight still managed to forcibly scatter out of the way. Of the remaining two, one just barely escaped, but...

“Kh!”

A single flower of red flames blossomed and a single trail of white smoke rose into the already glowing night sky.

This time, those on the Musashi raised their voices in celebration.

Segundo heard the enemy's cheers.

A blizzard of light filled the night sky and a wind with a nostalgic heat reached him, but the men and women around him all raised their hands.

“Ohhhh!!”

They cried out.

“We're not gonna lose!”

“Yeah, I've got a grandkid watching this!!”

“I'd be painful if he said it was his grandfather's fault we lost...especially if he said it in front of your grave.”

They all laughed and that showed they were still plenty calm.

However, a sudden wind arrived. It was a vertical wind coming from Musashino and Okutama at the Musashi's center and the sudden wind raging up and down meant only one thing.

“It's ascending!?” asked Segundo “But it shouldn't be able to move!”

He then saw a certain sight. Most of the towing belts on the six port or starboard ships had been detached and Musashino and Okutama had begun a rapid ascent.

“The Musashi has separated its eight ships to pilot them separately!?”

Juana saw the change in the fires of war visible in the distant sky.

“It can’t be.”

The Musashi and Segundo’s small ships appeared to be on even footing, but a change had come over the Musashi. She assumed those on the scene had already noticed.

...It’s started piloting its ships separately.

The chaff prevented the automatons from coordinating, so the eight ships could not fly in unison. In that state, piloting a single ship risked a collision with another one.

...So the Musashi was supposed to be rendered motionless.

However, those around her had also caught on and they started pointing at the giant ship.

“Hey.... Look at that. The Musashi is separating.”

Musashino and Okutama alone had begun a rapid ascent. They brought themselves about a half-ship’s height above the port and starboard ships.

“Piloting the individual ships was supposed to be impossible, but are they doing it without coordination between the automatons!? How!?”

A closer look showed the port and starboard ships were awkwardly but definitely zigzagging to the left and right.

The eight ships were all moving independently to create a situation advantageous to the Musashi.

“Chancellor!”

A cold sweat washed over Adele as she watched the sign frame within Musashino's bridge.

It contained data from the individual stealth used during the arming and modifications performed at England.

Currently, that data was being used for "Musashino" and the other captain automatons to redistribute their personnel.

Their speed had dropped, but Musashino was ascending along with Okutama. They had never before looked down on the other six ships like this and they had never seen those six ships zigzag so widely to the left and right. This was their first time trying anything like this.

...It's dangerous, but we have no choice.

It had frightened Adele when the Tres Españan ships had moved in between the Musashi's ships. Even if they had endured the mechanical phoenixes and defended with the transport ships, they could barely attack the enemy formation and could only be torn apart from within.

To pilot the ships individually, they had tried to use a signal to communicate between ships, but the enemy wheel formation had interfered. If they tried to send out a signal from the deck or near the bridge, the enemy would fire shells at them.

That was when the commander of the Technohexen unit had sent in an idea. That commander was Naito.

The Technohexen were using their brooms to float above the bow and both sides of each ship. While remaining too high for the enemy ships to fire on them, they dangled down spell light torches to indicate the location of their ship.

Piloting the individual ships based on that was slow and awkward. It even looked amateurish.

However, that movement held great meaning. As Musashino and Okutama rose, they could attack downwards more easily and they would fire when the port and

starboard ships opened a space in their zigzagging pattern. Also, the enemy's attacks had a harder time of reaching Musashino and Okutama and they had difficulty targeting the zigzagging ships.

It looked like they were writhing in agony from the battle of attrition, but if one looked at the advantages of their positions...

...This should work!

The Holy Spell chaff was putting considerable restrictions on their movements and the explosion had greatly damaged them. Also, "Musashino's" calculations made it clear their counterattack through individual piloting would leave them even more damaged.

However, they had to work to keep the needle of this battle of attrition from pointing too far on their opponent's side.

"Please do your best to keep the ships' movements as unpredictable as you can! And fire back!"

Segundo held his breath while surrounded by the Musashi which was moving as if writhing in pain and yet yearning for freedom.

...Now you've done it.

He had thought they had the Musashi cornered, but the enemy had used that to turn everything around.

The wheel formations were unable to reach the zigzagging port and starboard ships or the two risen ships, but those ships could fire on them.

They were supposed to have a unilateral victory here, but now they were surrounded and cornered.

But...

“Commander! This isn’t over yet, is it!”

“Like with the *falla* festival dance... And like the Lepanto and Itsukushima, we haven’t even gotten started at this point!”

“Testament,” replied Segundo while quietly raising his right hand. “Extend the wheel formation vertically so it can reach the Musashi’s two central ships and its second port and starboard ships! If the wheel formations hold back the zigzagging ships, our attacks can reach them!”

Even so, they could not avoid a battle of attrition and Segundo assumed they all understood that.

However...

“Testament. Let’s do it, everyone! Isn’t that right, commander!”

“Yes.”

Segundo swung his hand forward.

“Let’s go, everyone,” he said. “Even if their gravity barriers are back, we can still fire from a blind spot and we have an overwhelming advantage in numbers. The real retreating battle begins now. But remember this.”

Remember this.

“The results we earn here belong to us.”

A plaza with a fountain in the center was located on the border between city and forest.

Two girls with the Urban Names of a wolf and a hound faced each other there.

A single motion occurred between them in the moonlight.

Walsingham moved first.

She moved in a straight line.

“Go!”

She launched herself and her blades in order to clear the fountain.

Her feet tore into the stone structure surrounding the fountain as she made the high-speed leap.

Meanwhile, the silver wolf took action to intercept. She made a horizontal swing of the log hammer she had created with her right chain.

However, the hound read her enemy's action and struck the chain with 32 blades.

This defense deflected the chain with a surface, but the chain did not stop.

The reason for this was simple: the chain was wrapped around a log at the halfway point as well as at the hammer. Not only did this add weight, but the blades were unable to accurately strike the portion of the chain wrapping around the log and were deflected.

The chain could not be knocked away as before.

However, the chain's movement was slowed by the weight of the extra log.

The hound would bite at the wolf before the primary log arrived.

But before that, the chain swung itself around. Rather than striking the hound with the hammer at the end, it used the log at the center to swipe at her with a lariat.

However, the hound accelerated. She had a way of accelerating in midair. First, she sent her detached right arm below her feet.

“Dash ahead!”

Then, she fixed the arm in the air and kicked off of it.

Walsingham accelerated and corrected her direction. She aimed a bit downwards where the silver wolf stood.

“Bite!”

She fired and then twisted the cross spear into her enemy.

However, the cross spear cut through empty air and the shot tore into the dirt ground.

The enemy had jumped.

With right arm raised, the silver wolf jumped into the air above the fountain as if scraping away at the moon.

She was using her chain.

She lifted herself into the night sky as if pulling herself with the weight of the two logs and also as if pulling herself up to the chain.

Without turning back toward her, Walsingham swung her hair.

Something spilled from her whipping hair and into the sky.

They were yellow fruits. Those six lemons were enough to destroy a wolf’s sense of smell.

The fruits were sliced in two instantly and their juice sprayed into the darkness. Also, Walsingham accurately aimed her cross spear at Mitotsudaira without turning around.

“Bite!”

And she fired.

Mitotsudaira saw Walsingham's attack.

It was an accurate behind-the-back shot.

Also, she had drawn Mitotsudaira's attention by throwing the lemons first. Slicing open the lemons was enough of an attack, but just to be sure, she had saved this shot for her true attack.

"Well done," said Mitotsudaira while gathering strength in the left silver chain.

The two chains dangling from her wrists were currently sinking into the fountain's water.

"It is time for the knight to redeem herself."

She spoke as if howling and the fountain's water exploded. The chains curled up at the bottom of the fountain launched a massive amount of water into the air.

In an instant, the plaza was filled with mist.

Walsingham recognized the danger of this rising night mist.

The thick mist at the bottom of the plaza had formed from the scattering fountain water. The citrus fruit sank to the bottom of the water which suppressed its smell and the mist made for poor visibility.

Walsingham suddenly sensed motion.

"...!?"

And she heard repeated groaning and snapping sounds from the forest behind her.

It sounded like trees were toppling.

...*What!?*

The hound launched herself in the opposite direction.

But as she landed on the north side of the fountain, something touched her shoulder. It was a hard object and she also heard a chain moving down at her feet.

“...!?”

She reflexively leaped.

It was too dangerous within the mist and something was happening there.

The only way to escape the mist to was to move upwards, so the hound kicked off the branches of the trees surrounding the plaza, kicked off the low roof of a house, kicked off the wall of an apartment building, and reached its roof.

Below her, she saw a cloud of mist the same shape as the plaza, but there was no sign of the enemy on the rectangular roof.

Where was the enemy?

She then realized the moonlight was washing over her.

With no obstruction this high up in the city of London, the direct moonlight caused her to tremble.

Where was the enemy?

She did not know, but she could not let herself fear. She would protect what it was she liked.

So...

“La...”

With hands and feet on the straw roof, she bent back and gave a cry.

“Luo!!”

As she threw back her head, she finally saw it.

A silver form stood in the moon above her.

As he ran, Tenzou sensed a tremendous voice behind him.

...Was that the cry of a beast!?

He did not know what was happening, but it was clear the battle was advancing.

Something powerful was battling in the city behind him and he also heard arbalests being fired repeatedly.

However, he heard his own footsteps most of all.

Far beyond the cityscape before him was a square fortress.

It was the Tower of London.

...I can see it!

Without letting his joy distract him, he opened a sign frame while running.

He was contacting Masazumi. As vice president, she had asked him to call her once he had finished confessing, but he thought it would be best to notify her that he was almost there.

However...

“It won’t go through?”

Due to the armada battle, England and Musashi was using shared divine transmission settings. Masazumi was using a handheld shrine because her Mouse was not yet attached to her, but he should still have been able to reach her.

The fact that he could not reach her made him a little uneasy.

...I’ve made it!!

The main road continued on in a straight line.

He could see the staircase leading to the first level at the end of the road, but the Tower of London was visible to the right.

While listening to the sounds of various nearby battles and the reverberations of the aerial battle far behind him, Tenzou swung his arms and swung his body forward.

“...!”

And he accelerated.

Chapter 56: Howler in the Theatre

CHAPTER 56

"Howler in the Theatre"



From whose point of view

Is it a tragedy?

And what is the opposite?

Point Allocation (Sentiment)

From whose point of view

Is it a tragedy?

And what is the opposite?

Point Allocation (Sentiment)

The people of London watched the overhead swordfight between King Lear and Michizane.

Even in their houses and behind their shutters, they could hear it and feel the wind.

The king pushed forward with repeated uses of his two swords while the Far Eastern noble responded with his lightning sword.

The white lightning sword arced through the sky and white light scattered when it was blocked by the crossed swords of its opponent.

They crossed swords with each other, launched a sword toward their opponent's openings, deflected their opponent's strikes, changed height and angle to attack again, and launched new strike after new strike.

They exchanged blows as if dancing and as if testing their opponent's limits.

They wielded their weapons almost like wings, took steps that seemed to kick up waves, and turned the streets of London into the footing for a battle with all the roaring wind and white sparks that entailed.

The king and noble's swords met and groaned as the two stepped sideways over the Thames and created great flowers of sparks from their swords with Westminster Abbey between them.

The people obeyed the queen's command by leaving their shutters and curtains closed.

However, the queen did not rebuke them for peering through the cracks or cheering.

“Don’t lose!” shouted the Hamlet girl.

Hearing that, the king gave a small smile under his armor.

Everyone knew that Shakespeare’s Logismoi Oplo turned any attacks against her into internal Blessings, so they used that fact.

“Open the divine network! Choose your words carefully when cheering Shakespeare on! Tell her she needs to fight better! Otherwise it won’t reach her!!”

However, they also said something else with great expectation in their voices.

“Who’s the idiot who made Shakespeare call out King Lear!?”

Honestly.

“This isn’t something we’re supposed to see for free!!”

Neshinbara wrote.

He had not moved from his position on the bridge and Shakespeare had not moved from the end of the bridge.

To write was to imagine, so even if they could not see it, they could read the battle between king and noble from the text their opponent wrote and give their character the appropriate action.

Words were convenient.

However, words could not perfectly represent or convey one’s imagination. Even when writing “red”, the red the writer imagined would not be the same red the reader imagined. There would be two different colors.

However, it was that very ambiguity that made imagining and creating with words so much fun. How could one best build up the vision in their head and how could they best convey it to others?

That's right, thought Neshinbara. *I want to get something across to her.*

The girl in front of him sent more words his way.

<<King, wield your swords and attack the one who wields the power.>>

The moonlight was briefly obstructed as the king began to run.

Neshinbara responded by dedicating his instructions to the noble.

<Accept this power.>

<This is your final opponent.>

That's right, Neshinbara muttered in his heart. *This is the opponent that will guide me to my future.*

Who was she? Which one was she?

Long ago, he had met a girl who could consult herself about things. His time with her had been strange and lively. Perhaps because there were two of her, she had learned everything quickly and he had been unable to keep up.

They had been in a boring place and they had quickly finished reading every book available to them.

It had begun with discussions of their experiences in coming that far. Before long, they had started discussing fun and occult things and they eventually added in legends and the dramas popular in the city.

...And then we started making them ourselves.

Because they had been doing it to kill time, they had been completely serious. And because she had been able to consult herself, her works were always well-made. He had thought they were just like what an adult would make.

When editing each other's works, she had performed a hellish double-check of his works and he had rarely found much to correct about hers.

Even now, that probably remained true.

<Don't let your guard down.>

He would not.

<Gain a firm foothold and lower your hips.>

He gathered strength.

<The time to randomly wield your power has passed.>

That was right.

<Let's go.>

He agreed.

<I think it's time I joined you where you are.>

Neshinbara wrote while hoping it got through to her.

<I will be going now.>

"Hey," she asked. "Which do you think I am?"

He thought about her question for a bit before answering.

"It's hard to say," he said. "But I did remember one thing."

“What’s that?”

“Well,” he answered. “When you were with me you spoke a lot more formally.”

“...”

“When did you start speaking so casually?”

“Well...” She spoke slowly and quietly. “When you left.”

<<King, let out a cry. Cry out because you are aware of your misunderstanding yet also of your righteousness.>>

<Power.>

<Oh, power.>

<Carry the king’s righteousness to him.>

<<But, king, test that righteousness.>>

<<If that righteousness will bring tragedy, does it have any value? Test it and see, king.>>

<So what if it doesn’t?>

<I’m still going.>

<I will go there no matter what.>

<I will go to the righteousness place you once saw.>

“Then where did I go!?” she shouted. “Where did the formal me go!?”

<<The king lets out a roar and swings down his twin swords with two distinct surefire movements.>>

<The power moves straight toward the king.>

<<But the single power can strike but one of the king's twin swords.>>

<<One of the king's swords breaks.>>

<<But the young power is struck by the remaining sword.>>

<<The king weeps.>>

<<He holds the corpse of his beloved and lets out a wail based in his own righteousness.>>

The manifestation of Michizane vanished and the remaining king fell to his knees and opened his mouth toward the night sky.

The tragedy had ended. The scream indicating the loneliness brought by the king's righteousness would be released into the heavens.

However, some words stopped it.

<The power brings an end to his righteousness.>

“Eh?”

She saw him. She saw him still typing words into his sign frame.

“Brings an end to his righteousness? How!?”

He did not give voice to a reply, but he did type one with text.

<Go, Macbeth.>

<Go, usurper of the throne.>

<Stand up and save the king.>

“That’s impossible!!” shouted Shakespeare.

Neshinbara shook his head.

“No, it isn’t.”

“How?”

“With some editing.”

While they faced each other from the bridge and just off the bridge, he held up his right arm.

“I broke down your Macbeth as a spell and rewrote it. Of course, I was only able to do it because I’m in this festival your stage created.”

Overhead, a young warrior appeared and stood calmly before the wailing king.

Shakespeare looked up at him.

“But then...this isn’t Macbeth! Macbeth can’t complete his usurpation!”

“No, it’d probably make for a terrible play. But stories are flexible. It may be a failure as a version of Macbeth, you can always make a different story on that groundwork. And I wonder if the people who’ve seen Macbeth a few times have ever wondered this.”

He spoke while moving his feet forward and across the rest of the bridge.

“Why couldn’t someone have made Macbeth into the king?”

So...

<Go, Macbeth.>

<Save the king.>

<Do what you must do and save the king going mad from the loneliness brought by his own righteousness.>

He had one thing to say.

<Stop the tragedy with your victory.>

With those words, Macbeth stepped forward.

In that instant, the mad king rose and indeed regained his sanity. He gathered his movements, prepared his one sword, and performed a steady counterattack.

However...

<Macbeth easily evades the king's sword and thrusts his own blade into the king's heart.>

Precisely that happened.

<<Stand proud, Leir, King of Heroes. You have given up the throne, but your name shall be remembered for all eternity.>>

In the end, the king embraced his usurper.

<<Smile, king. Through the flow of blood, your will shall be carried on by the usurper.>>

King Lear slumped down as if nodding.

<The usurper is with the king.>

<The king's will shall never be forgotten.>

Everything but the still moonlight vanished as the two of them stood at the end of the bridge.

She hesitantly brought a hand to her chest.

“I...”

She shook her head and asked him a question now that he had crossed the bridge.

“Which one am I?”

Neshinbara nodded and gave a simple answer.

“Why not just say it’s the one that liked me?”

“Eh!? Wait! What’s this!? That came out of nowhere!”

“I mean, it’d be kind of sad if it was the one that hated me. So if we don’t know, this way is more convenient for me, don’t you think?”

“What?” asked Shakespeare while her face and ears grew red. “You idiot! Th-this isn’t about convenience. ...And there’s no way to tell them apart based on that!”

He wondered if she knew what that implied and he gave a silent sigh while hoping that didn’t mean both of them hated him.

“Anyway,” he said. “I’m here, so where are you?”

She thought about that and lowered her head.

“...Here.”

“You made your way to England and did your very best here.”

Her glasses glanced up toward him when she heard that. She then leaned over and pulled a small book from the paper bag behind her.

It was the first printed work Neshinbara had ever made.

He shuddered as he wondered why she had it and questioned why his past embarrassment had to be shown off here as well.

“You only made fifty copies, so it was not easy getting one. I paid an exorbitant amount at an auction in Genova.”

She audibly flipped through the pages.

“What was with this Sexy Dynamite Beam? Is it dynamite or a beam?”

“That’s your issue with it!?”

“What’s wrong with that? Honestly, and I was wondering if you and the illustrator were close.”

“Sorry, but that isn’t happening. There’s just no way.”

He seriously thought that, but Shakespeare did not seem to care.

“I think it was pretty original at the time for the heroine princess to be twins.”

“Yeah, about that...”

“The bigamy end was even more original.”

He had been prepared for this, but it essentially meant his life was over. She laughed and then slowly pulled a white and black shield from the paper bag.

It was the Logismo Oplo.

“As promised. The queen will probably scold me and the people will say things about me. But...”

But...

“I don’t need it anymore. I’ve seen most every kind of criticism and I’m sure you’ll need it soon.”

“Are you sure? You’ll lose your inherited name.”

“Probably. And it’s going to be tough gathering ether fuel.” She shrugged. “But King Lear without the king dying can work. After all, the real King Leir was deceived by two of his daughters, but he was saved by his youngest daughter Cordelia and he restored peace. Shakespeare only modified it into a tragedy.”

So...

“The only one who can inherit the name of Shakespeare is me now that I’ve experienced *something even greater* just now.”

“You seem pretty confident and you do work for a complicated queen. But as long as you remain Shakespeare, I suppose the king will still die and he won’t hand the throne over to the usurper.”

Neshinbara suddenly pointed to the right.

“Hey, can you look over there for a second?”

“Eh?”

As soon as she looked over, he swiped the shield from her hands.

“Ah.”

By the time she turned around, he was already running away with shield in hand.

“Eh!? What!? What’s going on!?”

<It means I stole the Logismoi Oplo from you.>

<After all, I am Macbeth.>

“You’re up, people of the city!!”

The city replied to his shout. The people banged on their shutters from within. The percussive notes almost sounded like applause and Shakespeare gave a troubled smile in the moonlight.

“So we can have a Macbeth who becomes king, can we?”

Bitterness entered her smile and she brought a hand to her chest.

“Then can we have a king who wants to be with Macbeth?”

She bowed and an even greater din sounded out.

In the Tower of London’s changing chamber, Mary watched the end of the play using London as its stage.

...Why are Musahi’s people here?

She thought on the meaning of the kunai Milton had brought her.

“Is it Master Tenzou?”

As soon as she muttered that, a sudden voice came from the door behind her.

“Mary, the city seems to have grown rather lively.”

It was the Fairy Queen. Mary turned toward the voice and listened to it through the door.

“Let’s play a game, Mary. The same game we used to play with father.”

The words delivered after a breath backed Mary’s suspicions.

“Let’s make a gamble to see whether we should give our time to the fool who may be here soon.”

However, she heard another noise on top of the voice. It came from the distance on the south end of the city.

...A wolf's howl?

“Oh?”

Elizabeth gave a small sigh before continuing.

“Will the French wolf try to steal England’s moon?”

Walsingham saw the silver wolf stand up high with the light behind her.

With her arms crossed and her curly silver hair blowing in the wind, she perfectly overlapped the second moon.

She was to the north of the plaza. That spot had been empty before, but a wooden pillar had been formed for her to stand on.

The trees of the forest had been cut into logs with the wolf’s chains and then connected vertically.

She had her back to the moon while higher than the city of London.

And she spoke.

“A pillar standing in a park has two meanings. The first is a symbol of vegetative growth as seen in the maypole or the festival of Beltane. The other is one you should be well aware of as part of the public morals committee.”

“Scaffold.”

“Judge,” replied the wolf. “Once, a certain non-human girl from Hexagone Française was executed by England. It was during the Hundred Years’ War. Hexagone Française was on the verge of being ruled by England when the Maid of Orléans saved them. The girl led a unit of non-humans to liberate Hexagone Française, but she was captured by England and executed.”

Walsingham had heard of this from Drake. He would occasionally mutter about it.

Because of that, she had once looked into it.

“It occurred in the land of Rouen which was mainland territory belonging to England at the time. I have heard that even England sent members of the Testament Cross-Borders Unit during the history recreation of the execution. However, Hexagone Française sent a similar unit of non-humans.”

Walsingham knew that much. But for some reason, the closer Hexagone Française unit had never arrived despite being called for. That was why Drake suspected his grandfather’s unit had been betrayed.

However...

“Do you know the truth behind the execution? It seems the Hexagone Française unit arrived on the scene first, but the execution had already begun. They did not make it in time. No, from what I have heard, it was a little different than that.”

That is...

“The Maid of Orléans apparently wished for her own death. After all, she was of the angel race and she was prepared to disappear into heaven once her role was complete. She supposedly said, ‘This will bring an end to the war.’ No one else there wished for it to happen, but she was burned to ashes and ascended into heaven. And the truth of her martyrdom was not allowed to remain in the recreation of the Testament descriptions. So...”

At that point, something fell from the wolf’s shoulders and hips. They were fragments of silver that shook as they fell. These were the scattered pieces of the broken silver chains. The mist was slowly clearing over the plaza down below and the fallen fragments produced metallic noises around the wooden pillar rising up from there.

However, the wolf gave breath of satisfaction.

“The primary non-human force that fought alongside her managed to take some of her possessions from the scene. They were the execution tools that had been consecrated by the flesh, blood, and ashes of that holy maiden and angel. And they were made in England. One was a set of chains. The autonomous tools had enough power to bind an angel and they were later given the characteristics of an immortal race so they would not meet the same fate as her. And did you know this?”

With the moon behind her, the silver wolf opened her mouth in a crescent moon of a smile.

“On the night of a full moon, non-humans can use their full power.”

She then wrapped the silver chains below her feet. They looked like ripples or a lake surface reflecting the moonlight.

She sat in the center of the expanding ripple of silver, she raised her head toward the moon, and she howled.

“Ahh...”

Mitotsudaira did not resist her non-human instincts that throbbed in the moonlight.

She gave a slow, unsteady, yet carrying voice as she let her pulse run through her body and changed her voice to an “o” sound.

“Ahh... Ohh...!!”

Her voice continued trembling as it came forth and grew so high-pitched it seemed to travel endlessly through the sky. The wolf’s howl to the moon was joined by countless rustling sounds came from the earth.

The fragments of the silver chains fallen there shook and then made a sudden movement.

“Ohhh!!”

The shattered silver chains ascended. They clung to the wooden pillar of execution as if embracing it. They crawled up it with a sticky flowing motion, but their motion joined together with each other.

“————!!”

Two sprays of ether light rose along the surface of the wooden pillar. Those particles of light signaled for the broken silver chains to bathe in the moonlight and regain their form.

“These non-human chains can recover in the light of the full moon,” said the silver wolf. “You have returned to your birthplace, silver chains.”

She slowly stood, tore the four chains from the execution pillar, and lowered her arms. However, they were not bound by the chains. It looked more like they had torn the chains apart.

“It is a very old story and I do not know if it is true, but that is why I agree with Musashi’s princess. Musashi’s knight will also save any who have resigned themselves to execution.”

Then what would she do? The silver wolf stood with her back to the moon and faced Walsingham who was prepared to fight.

“Now, then.”

And she took a step into midair.

Just as Mitotsudaira stood one silver chain from the ground to the sky and placed a foot on it, Walsingham fired directly at her.

This is dangerous, realized Walsingham. This is a dangerous opponent.

A clear sound filled the sky and the white line she had fired was blocked by a log tossed up from below.

At the same time, she launched her hound's blades toward Mitotsudaira.

However, the silver wolf took action with the three chains she was not standing on.

“I'm in top form!”

The three of them were thoroughly wrapped around the logs rising from the plaza and they were sent Walsingham's way.

The wolf did not hesitate and she used her full strength to attack, so Walsingham jumped forward and down.

With the attack coming from the front, she could not attack in that direction with her cannon or blades.

However, she could see behind her, so she jumped below Mitotsudaira so that she could move past her.

As soon as she kicked off the roof, three strikes hit the straw roof, but they were meaningless if they did not hit. She placed her left arm beneath her feet and kicked off of it to accelerate further forward and down.

She continued on and instantly passed below the silver wolf.

“_____!”

Because she had used the three silver chains to attack the roof in front of her, Mitotsudaira could not turn them toward Walsingham right away. She could use the remaining chain she was standing on, but it did not hold a log and so Walsingham could deflect it with her blades.

While facing away, Walsingham aimed toward the wolf who was turning toward her.

However...

“You forgot something.”

Several lemon halves were thrown toward her back and they had already been squeezed of all their juice.

Mitotsudaira had presumably gathered them with her silver chains and the yellow objects were suddenly thrown toward the center of the back of Walsingham’s hair.

“...!?”

She lost sight of her target for an instant.

It was only a slight gap, but the enemy arrived in that instant.

The final silver chain that the silver wolf had stood on raced toward her.

However, she could deflect the light chain which did not hold a log. She only needed to strike it with a surface made from her hound’s blades.

And she did so.

However, Walsingham then saw that the deflecting blades were the ones deflected into the sky.

“!?”

Rather than simply having the final chain pursue Walsingham, Mitotsudaira herself pursued the hound while turning around.

She also saw the silver chain completely deflect the enemy’s blades into the sky.

...I did it.

The enemy clearly did not understand what had happened, but Mitotsudaira did. This was the same as what Horizon had shown her before.

“The trick to peeling an apple while holding the knife backwards is to twist it.”

The instant Walsingham’s blades had reached the chain’s holes, she had rotated the chain as if twisting. Before the blades could gouge into the holes, she had grabbed them with the holes and thrown them.

It was the same as providing an instant rotation as soon as someone grabbed your hand.

However, coming up with the idea and mastering its execution were two different things.

She had gotten training from Naomasa who studied martial arts, but she had been thrown to the tatami mats countless times and gotten into the same martial arts debates every night at the yakiniku restaurant. There, she had learned that Naomasa preferred salt over yakiniku sauce and that she needed to begin twisting her hand before her opponent grabbed it.

...And for some reason, half the class flocked to the restaurant and destroyed it!

Ignoring that last part, the chain and martial arts were the same. She had to twist the chain before the blades came to deflect it.

That would shorten the chain’s reach yet raise its attack power. Also, it could wrap around a joint-less automaton like Walsingham and prevent her from escaping.

And so she used that chain she had swung.

“Don’t think a hound can defeat a wolf on a moonlit night.”

She gave the silver chain a wrapping rotating and slammed Walsingham’s back into the fountain down below.

Mitotsudaira descended to the ground as if pursuing the enemy that had caused a great splash after being thrown down.

She then saw Walsingham's back spring up. Without turning around, the hound accurately aimed her cross cannon at Mitotsudaira and fired.

“Bite!!”

In that instant, Mitotsudaira leaped toward the cannon.

She swung her arms as if folding them in prayer and fully closed the cross's connection with a sharp blow.

The cross cannon lost an outlet for its power and it expanded while Walsingham held it over her shoulder.

It audibly ruptured, light burst out on Walsingham's shoulder, and her hair shook. However, Mitotsudaira thrust her left hand forward as if holding it toward the light.

“This is it!”

While slamming Walsingham into the fountain with her left hand, she pulled something from the hound's hair with her right and held it up.

“A Mouse!?”

Mitotsudaira looked at what dangled from her right hand amid the splashing sounds at her feet.

...A small Walsingham?

She had super-deformed proportions and she even had the proper head decorations and tail-like hair. However, she already had tears in her eyes.

“Noooo.”

She shook her entire body left and right as Mitotsudaira observed her. Just looking at her made her small form jump, but the larger body that was collapsed in the water slowly and awkwardly attempted to rise up.

However, the automaton in the water was only making simple, autonomous actions and Mitotsudaira realized what that meant.

“It wasn’t that you provided vision for the area behind her. You are the OS for that automaton, aren’t you?”

After a while the small Walsingham finally hung her head.

Whether that was a confirmation or not, Mitotsudaira sighed at the hound’s OS that had stopped resisting. She placed her on the stone structure surrounding the fountain and the tearful OS looked up in surprise.

However, Mitotsudaira had already run off.

“Please excuse me, but I must report this to my king.”

With a regretful swing of the hand to make the silver chain flutter, she intertwined her gloved fingers and brushed her lips over the nails. As she ran, she lightly bit the tips of her white gloves with her lips.

“I need to tell him it was thanks to him that I won.”

“I’m not going to let myself lose like this!!”

Masazumi was held to the floor by several skeletons.

Hatton currently held a dictionary over his head in prayer, so she pleaded to him.

“W-wait! Surely there’s a process for handling things like this!”

“I hate a restrained lifestyle! I hate it to death!”

“Are you really the Lord Chancellor!?”

He must not have wanted to answer because he ignored her. She could tell the situation was truly bad and she felt this was the end.

She belatedly realized just how much of a disadvantage her abilities put her in during a battle between representatives.

She felt like she was seeing the trick to such battles here.

...Physical ability and a personality that lets you ignore what anyone else says!

She knew both were impossible for her.

...But wait. My class is filled with people like that.

“Waaahhh! Am I the only one to get the short end of the stick!?”

“Perhaps, but that hellish pain has now reached its end!”

Just as Hatton swung down the dictionary, a sign frame from Asama appeared.

“Masazumi! Your Mouse went to you! It used a ley line divine transmission, so take it!”

“Eh!?”

She looked around, but saw nothing.

The surrounding skeletons exchanged glances.

“...?”

There was nothing there.

...It isn't here?

The Mouse that was supposed to be there was nowhere to be found.

At the same time, Asama's sign frame exceeded its allotted divine transmission time and vanished.

However, the Mouse remained absent.

“W-wait.”

Masazumi forgot about her own plight and felt a chill run down her spine.

That Mouse had not been attached to her. She had looked after it, but that and the treatment for its injuries were something any owner would have done.

She had not protected it. She had merely done the bare minimum.

She wondered if that was why it had not grown attached to her.

However...

...Isn't it dangerous for the Mouse if it messes up moving through a ley line divine transmission?

However, she had heard that method was often used of the Mouse's own will. It would use it when it wanted to see its master, when it was lost, or when it wanted to hurry back from an errand. The Mouse did it out of a desire for its master and when it had a proper recognition of its master.

She did not know why a Mouse that had not been attached to her would have tried to use it.

But...

“Eh? W-wait.”

Tears involuntarily welled up in her eyes.

No, she thought. Even if I survive this and return to the Musashi, will I only find an empty nest waiting for me?

That would be the same as with her mother.

And it was her own fault. The situation was partly due to putting herself into this dangerous situation and making the Mouse worry.

...*Why?*

Why had she done nothing more than worry for the Mouse instead of trying to get to know it better?

Had she been comfortable in the fact that it had not been attached to her and had she been afraid to grow any closer to it?

Had she been afraid it would dislike her?

...*No.*

She had once more done something irreversible.

What had she learned from her previous experience and what had she lost?

“No...”

As she muttered to herself, she saw Hatton begin to move.

He must have already said what he needed to say because he remained silent.

“_____”

As he swung down his arms, Masazumi let out a shout. She spoke the same words that had first leapt from her mouth when her mother had vanished and she had found the empty house.

“Are you gone!?”

There was nothing to speak an answer to that shouted question.

However, something did answer it with an action.

The front cover of the hard point part on her neck opened and a young anteater jumped out.

...*Eh?*

What it meant for a Mouse to have come to her and the meaning of a Mouse's very existence was something that Asama and the others might have understood but that a Mouse beginner like Masazumi did not.

A Mouse's place was not next to or near its master. It was with its master and inside the hard point part.

After hopping out, the young anteater spun around on top of her chest.

“_____!!”

With a howl that could be interpreted as anger or strength, a multitude of sign frames appeared around the anteater. Masazumi had never seen so many sign frames and they were all anti-spirit purification exorcism spells.

Also, a divine text from Asama arrived.

“To celebrate the confirmation of the master/Mouse relationship and to act as an emergency flare for you, I stuffed in every attack spell I could think of. Simply delightful, isn't it!?”

Is that anything for a shrine maiden to be saying? wondered Masazumi.

However, the surrounding Living Dead were clearly panicking.

As even more spells expanded outwards, they all exchanged a glance, let go of Masazumi, and spoke in awkward Far Eastern with calming gestures.

“Boss, how about we calm down?”

“Sic ‘em!!”

In the center of the danger, the young anteater did its best to comply.

As a beginner, its strategy was simple: it drew back in fear, closed its eyes, and fired every spell touching it in every direction.

“_____!!”

As they all shouted out, a chaos of explosions that only affected spirits filled the inside of the transport ship.

From the heights of London, Dudley heard an explosion and saw a bright white light from the distant sea.

...That's purification light, isn't it?

In that case, Hatton was likely out of the fight. *That Lord Chancellor is always too kind to people*, she thought while focusing on her own battle.

She was currently firing arbalest quarrels at the black-winged Technohexen before her.

The Testamenta Arma named Brachium Justitia on her left hand allowed her to control weapons. Her aim was accurate and she sent eight short quarrels toward the Technohexen's stomach.

However, the Technohexen swung her right hand and the white pen she held drew a white line.

“Th-th-th-that is the acceleration line you used in the Battle of Mikawa, isn't it!?”

Before the Technohexen could nod, the line captured the eight quarrels. She had predicted their path and placed a quick heart shape there.

Before Dudley could mock her for drawing something so cute, the acceleration line accelerated the quarrels toward the end of the line. In other words, toward Dudley.

The heart-shaped acceleration line catapulted the quarrels directly toward her face. Dudley realized this Technohexen was no one to joke around with and she held out her right palm.

“S-s-s-s-smash!!”

She used the repelling ability of her right palm to hit back the eight attacks. However, she did more than simply hitting them back. She also used her Testamenta Arma to correct their aim in the instant she touched them. This way, they were sure to directly return to her opponent.

However, the Technohexen had already drawn a new acceleration line.

But it was not a mere line.

It was a drawing and Dudley understood why she would do that.

...That way it doesn't count as a weapon!!

If it was not a weapon, she could not control it with Brachium Justitia. The Technohexen had learned that lesson from their previous encounter and she had overcome it with her own ability.

However, Dudley held out both her hands. The right hand could repel and the left could correct the aim. With those two abilities, she could send any attack back to her opponent just by touching it.

And she did so.

“...!!”

Chapter 57: Pair Lying in Wait

CHAPTER 57

"Pair Lying in Wait"



You have willpower
Where is it?

Point Allocation (Your Time to Shine)

You have willpower

Where is it?

Point Allocation (Your Time to Shine)

Dudley began a high-speed rally with the Technohexen using the eight quarrels.

They both targeted the other's body and face, so a single miss would mean death or serious injury.

They were approximately six meters apart, so their actions were taken at a point between close and long range.

They returned and sent forth attacks. When the attacks were sent back, they would hit them in backhand or volley poses. Sweat would fly eight times in a row and as many solid sounds would fill the air.

Dudley spun her body for eight backhands and then spun back for a series of forehand strikes.

...I-I-I-I-I can't lose!!

She would not let herself lose.

“C-C-C-C-Cecil!!”

“Got it.”

She had said nothing, but if Cecil understood, that was fine.

There was something they both understood quite well without saying it aloud.

“W-w-we are the queen's aides!!”

A loss was unacceptable. If the aides lost, it would mean they had allowed someone to approach the queen.

...We must not lose!

Before her, stars and the sun were being drawn in single strokes. She also saw the moon, the shapes of continents, trees, the ocean, mountains, clouds, musical notes, symbols, and even writing.

This was a skilled opponent and Dudley understood that. She had done well against Dudley in their previous encounter and an opponent like that would have polished and sharpened her skill before a revenge match.

And so Dudley spoke up.

“I-I-I-I will give this everything I have!!”

She fired the arbalests again to double the amount, so a total of sixteen quarrels were being exchanged on the battlefield.

In response, the Technohexen’s eyes opened wide.

“All-Nighter Mode!!”

She rolled up her right sleeve and changed how she held the pen. She pinched it near the tip using her thumb and forefinger and she pushed it up with the side of her middle finger.

That grip poured great strength into the pen. It was not suited for long use, but it was perfect for a short and quick battle.

Her drawings grew a bit forceful and included more straight lines.

However...

“I-i-i-is that your true art style!?”

The Technohexen did not bother replying. She merely drew in the air with acceleration lines scattering everywhere. She did not even look at Dudley. Her gaze was entirely focused on the path of the quarrels and her own lines. Dudley then saw something in the Technohexen’s eyes that watched the number of lines

grow in her strengthened drawings that now formed people, landscapes, dialogue, and symbols.

“ ... ”

She was smiling.

Dudley knew that look.

...Jonson and Shakespeare get it sometimes!

She felt more frustration than danger and she knew exactly why.

...You idiot!

She wanted the Technohexen to look at her, but another thought ruled her mind.

...I won't lose!!

Just as the girl was more focused in drawing than intercepting the attacks, Dudley also had to grow serious. And there was something that would give her a smile as she did so: being with the queen.

In truth, the Fairy Queen had quite a few problems. She made inappropriate comments quite a lot, she made a fair number of mistakes in her work, and she made misunderstandings or grew defiant far too often, so an aide like Dudley was constantly busy cleaning up after her.

...I'm so busy I ended losing too much weight! Yes, when I weighed myself last, I had lost seven grams. Maybe I have some kind of health problem!

But just like Cecil and the others, she was intent on supporting the queen no matter what. After all...

...She saved me.

As Cecil floated in the air and rose further to pour down more weight, she looked away from Kimi who seemed unable to move and she turned to Dudley.

...Don't lose. Don't lose, Dudley. You're really, really strong.

Cecil knew about Dudley's past.

...She wanted to die.

According to the Testament descriptions, Robert Dudley had been Elizabeth's lover.

During the rule of Mary I, he had been imprisoned for political reasons and he had sworn loyalty to Elizabeth when she had saved him, but a problem had occurred afterwards. While competing for Elizabeth's affection to acquire more political power, his wife had suddenly died. People had speculated Dudley had killed her to make a marriage to Elizabeth a possibility, so he had been shunned, he had fallen into decline, and he had died.

He had his glory, but his fall was certain and he lost all his honor. As such, no one had come forward to inherit his name and it had been forced onto a girl of the bloodline that had already inherited the Dudley name. And that girl was...

...Dudley.

When she was young, she had lost both her parents in the oppression brought on by Catholics and that had proved convenient. It allowed for the scenario in which she act as a member of the Anglican Church to oppose Mary and then be imprisoned.

The girl had been carefully raised while ignorant of her own fate, but at one point, she had suddenly learned of it.

And once she was imprisoned, she had learned a further truth.

If her existence as Dudley would cause a scandal for Elizabeth, it had been decided that it would be best if she remained imprisoned and did not create such a blot on the queen's reign.

That sort of interpretation was not uncommon. One's glory was stretched out as much as possible and the inconvenient parts were pushed to the very end and dealt with quickly.

...That's how it works.

In that prison she could never leave, Dudley had resented the queen and tried to commit suicide. But rumor had it she was healed and kept alive each time.

Cecil had heard from Dudley countless times how the cell door had suddenly opened one day. "A-a-a-a-and it was the queen!" she would say. However, the target of her resentment had not said she was there to save her. She had not apologized or otherwise tried to earn her gratitude. She had simply reached out an arm and said the following.

"I need you, Robert Dudley. It is with you that I can bring order my land forces and it is with you that my palace will grow a bit livelier. I can get lonely, so the latter is more important."

Dudley had asked if she was not afraid of the scandal.

"I don't mind, so neither should you."

Dudley had mentioned how much she resented the queen.

"Plenty of people resent me, so don't worry about it. I don't mind."

Dudley had asked what she was supposed to do.

"Use your power and die whenever you wish. That is the ultimate luxury and not many people are granted it."

Dudley had always looked so happy while telling the story. Cecil also knew why Dudley never ate and kept on the fetters from her imprisonment.

...She wants to remain imprisoned.

Otherwise, the Testament Union might force them to carry out the history recreation of the scandal. She was attempting to settle it with only a release on parole, but she was not doing it for the queen's sake.

...It's so she can be with the queen.

Cecil felt she was the same.

The Testament descriptions said William Cecil was Elizabeth's friend and aide, but excessive eating made him synonymous with obesity in England. He was not someone whose name anyone would try to inherit and that was why a farmer's daughter who loved to eat had been chosen.

She had been overwhelmed when thrown into the politics and education that she did not know the first thing about.

She had wanted to play rather than study. Those around her could do so much, but she could do nothing. However, she felt it was fine if she could not do anything. In fact, she felt that was normal. It was the others who were strange. Jonson for example would suddenly give himself injections, but that had to be some kind of sickness.

She had been even more overwhelmed once she had been thrown in with all those people who could do things. Her average of thirty-seven loaves of bread a day had dropped to thirty-three. Cutting back on her food and losing weight was a good way of losing her inherited name, but she had felt that would disappoint her parents back on the farm.

Thus she had tried to find something she could do, but she had failed. Some things were simply too much for people.

If she could not do anything, she had decided to at least keep up her eating. After all, eating was fun.

She was not sure when she had realized that she could stay with the others as long as she was having fun.

However, she had found the queen beautiful even before realizing that. Cecil had started clapping when she had first seen the queen's wings shoot out. The adults around her had shuddered, but she did not know why.

“Pretty.”

She remembered the queen laughing when she had said that.

From then on, the queen had often consulted her. She had not known what to do or what was right, but she had still given an answer.

For example...

“I think this would make some money for the moment.”

“If it's just for the moment, then you don't have to do it.”

“Would doing this make the people unhappy?”

“If it's a good thing, good things will happen if you do it.”

She only ever said what she found obvious, but that seemed to be enough. She did not understand why, but the others had started consulting her too.

She knew that William Cecil had received devoted care from the queen for a long period on his deathbed. She did not know when that would happen or how it would happen, but she felt it was all worth it as long as she would obtain that.

I don't know what is so great about me, but that shows just how unskilled I am.

But it doesn't matter if I don't understand as long as the skilled people do understand. After all, it doesn't matter to me what's so good about me. That's something that helps other people.

However...

“Cecil!!”

She understood. She usually understood nothing, but this was one thing she did understand.

Don't lose.

Don't lose, me. Don't lose, Dudley.

And to do that...

“I won't lose.”

“Splendid.”

The warriors in reserve heard a strange girl speak. The bending of her clothes and the indentation in the ground showed just how much weight was bearing down on her, but she remained perfectly calm.

“It seems everyone is saying they ‘have to lose’ because of the history recreation and it was growing tedious. Saying you can always make it an interpretive loss is just another side of being a loser.”

“How selfish can you be?” asked someone.

“It's not like anyone has a choice,” said someone else.

However, the strange girl continued.

“I like women who refuse to lose.”

She took a slow step forward.

“I also like men who refuse to lose.”

She took a second step and then a calm third step.

“And when I refuse to lose, I am the most wonderful of them all.”

There was no slowing to her movements. Everyone wondered why because she supposedly had a massive amount of weight on her shoulders. Their vice president was already over twenty meters up.

“A flower cannot be beaten,” said the girl. “No matter how harsh the location and no matter how much snow and dirt pile on top of it, come spring, its stalk will extend it will bloom toward the sun. And a flower will enjoy itself even if there is no one around to see it. Also, it may wither in the fall, but it will bloom again in the spring. There is no loss there. It is constant cycle of victory.”

Therefore...

“Even under a great weight, a flower will not lose. It will rise above it and achieve victory all for its love of itself. That is why people refer to flowers as ‘proudly blooming’.”

In that instant, a change occurred in the sky above them all.

After Cecil floated even further up, her altitude suddenly dropped.

Cecil noticed something happen each time the flashy girl down below took a step.

...*I fall!?*

She was falling. It became obvious at around the third step. Each further step she took worked toward releasing Cecil’s spell.

...*Why?*

She did not understand. Not understanding was normal for her, but when she had inherited the name of Cecil, the adults had given her this weight spell as a part of being a competitive eater. The queen had even praised it and said seeing it put her in a good mood.

Nevertheless, it was being removed. She wondered why and felt it was unfair.

This girl was the one who had danced at Mikawa, so she had placed the weight on her to keep her from dancing. The weight would crush her and prevent her from making dance steps or lightly spinning around. The tension in the girl's skirt was proof of that.

So how was she able to walk and release Cecil's spell?

"You're a pretty good example of a woman, so I'll tell you what's going on," said the flashy girl as she brushed a hand through her bangs. "Spinning and waving your arms are not the only ways to dance. Do you get what I mean?"

Cecil then realized she was hearing a noise.

"Footsteps."

"Judge. Well done. I see you're the type to notice the small things that fools overlook. Yes. Judge. Producing footsteps, clapping your hands, and speaking out all go back to the rhythm of a drum and the origins of dance. And..."

Cecil listened to the footsteps of the approaching girl. They sounded almost like...

"The rhythm of your pulse. The origin of those rhythmic footsteps, clapping, and shouting is the most primitive rhythm. That rhythm is the wave-like music we all learn in our mothers' womb. That is the basis from which music and dance were created. Did you know that both song and dance are said to delight the harvest? They are said to be an act of life."

The strange girl laughed and then gave a bitter smile.

"But that's enough for the lecture. It just doesn't suit me."

Cecil wanted to hear more, but she had a feeling the girl would not tell her the rest. She wondered if the queen would tell her.

However, she was currently dropping.

She decided to strengthen her spell. She focused herself and imagined herself gaining weight. With candy, cake, and cream, she could just use a giant mug. Milk would be good too. It was best with just enough sugar that it could be seen at the bottom. Add some fried meat and it would be irresistible. However, her imagination brought a change over her.

...It makes my heart race.

“This dance is inside you as well.”

She lowered and continued to lower.

...No. If I fall, the queen will be sad. So will Dudley. I'll lose.

But...

...I'm dancing too?

“Yes. The queen, that skinny woman, and everyone else are the same, so no one wins and no one loses. Just bring a hand to your chest and take a step.”

The footsteps synced up.

This racing of her heart was what happened when she was having fun. When it happened to Dudley, she would shout about her blood pressure and cause a commotion, but everyone's standard reaction was to laugh.

If it also happened to the queen and everyone else, even if Cecil could not do anything, she and the others were all doing the same thing when they were having fun.

“We're all dancing?”

“Heh heh heh. A politician needs to be able to make people dance as she wishes.”

The next thing she knew, the smiling face was even with her own.

Oh, no, she thought. But she also thought she had been taught something important. She truly was an idiot. Her mind was in complete disarray and she could not make sense of anything.

However, she knew she could not let herself lose, so she tried to stay true to that.

“Sorry.”

She did not know who she was apologizing to as she tried to add on even more weight. At the same time, she wondered if the excited beating of her heart would vanish if she crushed the flashy girl.

“...!!”

“Going all out even against someone of lower rank. I can respect that attitude!!”

Dudley heard the Technohexen speak, but she continued nonetheless.

“More!!”

She fired her arbalests twice for a total number of quarrels four times the initial number.

However, the Technohexen smiled.

“Here it comes! This is trouble! Miss Naruze’s in trouble! What’s this!? Is she bringing this to a dead heat just before the deadline!? Is this the same as ordering manga on the divine network despite only having half an hour to finish her manuscript!?”

...You idiot!!

The Technohexen’s brain was experiencing the same high as one did late at night. With no concern for her reputation, she began singing divine anime songs with a serious expression as she continued her work. Meanwhile, Dudley prepared the next rally.

She removed the Testamenta Arma from her left hand.

The power to repel attacks was her own ability. She had gained it in order to reject anything and everything while in the darkness of that prison cell.

It was technically not a Testament Sign and there were several vertical scars on her left wrist. She had gained the repelling ability as compensation for those. When she had tried to spill her own blood, her tension had tightened and closed the blood vessels, so she had swung her arm in an attempt to open them.

The scattering blood had connected with the dimly-lit fairies hidden in her cell and they had protected her.

The Fairy Queen had said the following about that power.

“Do not forget that negotiation requires both rejection and compromise.”

For that reason, the queen had allowed her to hide the scars with the Testamenta Arma. Dudley had therefore chosen to only use her one hand and she would never use them both at once.

But now she would.

This was not a site of negotiation, so no compromise was needed. She merely needed to strike back.

Her enemy was using her full speed to desperately hit back the thirty-two quarrels.

“...!!”

But this was likely her limit. After all, drawing a picture was not the same as striking with a snap of the wrist. That was why her drawings had gained a lot more small objects such as writing and symbols. It was to prevent them from becoming weapons, but it could not have been easy to keep it up this long.

Meanwhile, Dudley swung both hands. And...

“Th-th-th-th-there!!”

She targeted the Technohexen’s left side. The girl was right-handed, so she would have more difficulty hitting them back from there.

She could always evade them, but...

“I-I-I-I fired one last time.”

She had fired the arbalests for the fifth time. She had sent the instruction at the very last moment while removing Brachium Justitia. It had been a gamble whether it would reach the weapons or not, but it seemed to have succeeded.

With a sound much like bursting springs, eight additional quarrels were fired. These eight would arrive shortly after the thirty-two that were already difficult to return. Something would clearly be wrong if none of these hit.

And so they would hit.

But just before they did, Dudley saw something drawn in front of her.

“A number!?”

The Technohexen had drawn numbers a few times before, but this one had a unit after it.

...*Atell!*?

In that case, she had not been drawing pictures all this time. It had merely taken the form of a picture.

“You mean it was a spell!?”

The Technohexen gave a shout in response while making one last leaping motion of her pen.

“Herrlich!!”

A moment later, a magic spell expanded before Dudley's eyes. It used all the pictures, writings, characters, backgrounds, frames, dialogues, and symbols the Technohexen had drawn to form the framework of a story.

...A story of an impertinent girl who came to her senses once a friend slapped her!

It was a repelling defense spell.

Before Dudley could think anything more, the solid sound of the quarrels being repelled rang out like an instrument. The Technohexen gave a selfish pose of triumph toward the heavens and collapsed backwards.

“Finished!!”

Dudley understood what that word meant: her opponent had done everything she could do.

That meant it was Dudley's turn.

“...!!”

She held both hands up toward the total of forty quarrels. She believed she could return them, so she clenched her teeth and faced the approaching wall of quarrels.

“Kh!”

In that instant, she recalled the time when she had been freed from her cell.

It truly had been a sudden occurrence. After all, no one had come to drag her out. Instead, a girl had broken through the wall from the outside. To her utter surprise, it had been the Fairy Queen who had said the cell had been kept a secret from her. From that point on, everyone had chosen not to hide anything from the queen.

...But that was quite a thrill.

The power to repel in order to protect herself was an important power that could be called her very identity.

However, it seemed she needed someone else to provide the power that dispersed her own darkness.

In the present, she faced the wall before her.

“M-m-m-me too!!”

She decided that she had longed for that ever since that moment.

Two actions filled the next instant.

One was Dudley’s repelling hands sweeping through empty air.

The other was the approaching quarrels being struck forcefully from above and stabbing into the ground. There was only one reason why the quarrels would fall so suddenly.

“Cecil!?”

Cecil had placed her weight on the quarrels rather than her enemy.

That could mean only one thing: she was no longer specifying a single target for her weight.

...*She’s falling!?*

Dudley turned around and saw Cecil begin to fall from a height of about five meters. A normal human was unlikely to be too harmed in a fall from that height, but the situation was different for Cecil who could not move very well. The damage her weight would do to her bones would go beyond dangerous.

However, the crazy girl stood below Cecil.

“Heh heh heh. I’m not sure I can manage this one.”

It’s no use, thought Dudley. That strange girl’s spell is meant to deflect, not to catch.

And so Dudley tried to rush over there.

...My spell repels too.

That meant there was nothing she could do.

“Show your willpower!!”

In that moment, a group charged in from a different direction. A group of warriors rushed below Cecil.

They caught her and lowered her speed, but...

“Gwaaaah!”

They were crushed.

Dudley was dumbfounded as they all fell over, but they all gave thumbs ups while flattened beneath Cecil. Dudley gave a sigh of relief and looked to her left arm.

A bit of heat had gathered in the scars on her wrist and they turned a pale red.

...This power is meant to protect me and only me.

So how was she to protect others? *That’s a question to think about*, she told herself while looking around the area.

She saw enemies and allies.

She needed to form an official confrontation using that arrangement.

“W-w-w-w-we have done what we were meant to do, but I suppose it ended in a no contest due to intervention.”

“Heh heh heh. So you’re going to get out of it with that excuse?”

“I-I-I-I-I will take you on any time. As long as there is a reason worth risking our nation for.”

Dudley turned north toward the Tower of London.

“Now, perhaps the queen while bring an end to this!”

Tenzou ran.

About one hundred meters down the road and to the right, he could see the Tower of London.

He was on his way to the northwestern tower, but he could not see the top of that tower from his current position.

He breathed heavily while wishing it had been the closer southwestern tower.

He continued on. It was just one more road. Just one hundred more meters. Once he crossed the moat and climbed the wall, he would have arrived.

And so he ran.

But a group of warriors was guarding the moat in front of the tower.

They did not move toward him. That was only natural as they were fortifying that one position, but Tenzou remembered that this was the spot where he had parted ways with her.

And so...

“There!!”

He simultaneously threw three kunai into the shadow created by some eaves up ahead.

In that instant, the shadow rose.

“ ... ”

It took on human form and performed a swift slash.

It was Walter “Trident” Raleigh.

...Yamanaka Yukimori!!

As he stood up, he had already struck with a large gravity sword measuring over six meters. He did not name himself or take a defensive stance. He merely attacked.

It was a falling iai attack from the right shoulder yet performed with only the left arm.

There were no gaps in it and yet it had speed.

...He's fast!!

A horizontal strike targeting the waist cut quickly through the air and yet it seemed to linger. Even if Tenzou tried to flee to the side, an attack from a second blade on the left would reach him. Even if he fled under the eaves to the right, the large gravity sword would likely cut through the columns holding up the roof.

...In that case...

Tenzou made the correct decision.

He accelerated and lowered down to slip beneath the large gravity sword.

A shadow was falling on the road. It was cast by the gravity sword's hilt and the area below that straight line was a safe zone, so he charged just below it and spun to match the sweeping motion of the gravity sword.

The movement would bring him behind Walter's back.

However, he saw the man let go of the large hilt.

“...!?”

The gravity sword hilt struck the front of the house under the arcade and began to roll, but Walter used the lack of that excess weight to spin around even faster.

The movement would bring him in front of Tenzou to block the boy's way.

He spread his legs and extended his left arm to tell Tenzou to stop.

At the same time, his right arm made two movements. First, a snap of his right hand tossed a gravity sword hilt from his left side and down his left sleeve.

Second, he grabbed a different gravity sword with his right hand.

“...!”

He pressed it against his own chest. This was his seppuku-style clone technique using a gravity sword.

Another hilt had already fallen from his sleeve and into his left palm and the two Walters attacked at once.

As the twin attacks arrived, Tenzou gave a shout. His heart decided on the right and he swung his body in that direction.

“Yokomichi-sama!!”

“Don't use my old name!!”

Something burst from the back of his collar like a bullet.

It was the crow named Milton.

The black crow charged toward the right Walter that was in the process of swinging down his blade.

The crow spread his wings and legs but did not stop himself.

“You don’t know how to settle anything, do you!?”

He collided with Walter’s face as if embracing it.

“Go, young ninja! Go and abduct Scarred! I will take over everything the two of you leave behind!”

Walter may have divided into two, but he was still a single person. In that case, how would he perceive the collision from Milton? With a division-type clone technique, only one had to be blocked.

“That’s enough to throw off his senses!!”

Walter did indeed hesitate slightly. Milton had blocked the vision of the one to Tenzou’s right and he briefly moved to tear Milton away with his right hand. However, the Walter on the left made the same motion despite having nothing over his face.

The two of them were the same body.

Realizing he could make it through, Tenzou accelerated. He seemed to throw his body forward as he raised his speed.

However, Walter took action in return. He used the motion of the hips he had lowered in his confusion.

“...!”

And he performed a large and quick back step.

He fell back a good bit in order to retry his attempt to capture Tenzou. He also spread his legs with a twisting motion to throw a solid iai strike in the instant he landed.

However, Tenzou fearlessly charged on.

...This is the action I wanted!!

He continued forward, but he did so by throwing his legs forward, falling to his butt, and sliding.

“Here I go!!”

He slipped through the legs Walter had spread to support his attack.

It only took an instant.

Walter had not even launched his iai strike.

There was a simple reason why Tenzou managed to pass by so quickly. Even if Walter was an iai master, his balance would be tilted a bit toward his back after a jump backwards. Even if he tried to land in a forward stance and launch an iai strike, his stance would rise up a bit in the front.

As a result, his legs were spread a little more and his body raised a little more than with a standard iai strike.

That was why Tenzou was able to slip through.

Showing an obvious intent to accelerate while Walter's sight was impaired had been Tenzou's way of luring the man into doing this.

And so he continued on.

Nevertheless, Walter pursued him. The man swung his wrist as if to punch the ninja slipping beneath him and he tried to forcibly bring his sword directly down.

In response, Tenzou reached out a hand while sliding. He reached toward the hilt Walter was swinging down, placed his hand on the guard, and forcibly tugged it over his head.

“!?”

This pulled Walter's balance forward, but he let go of the gravity sword before he fell.

However, Tenzou used the downward-swinging motion of Walter's arm to accelerate his slide.

“...!”

He passed through.

He left the iai warrior behind him and began running as he rose to his feet.

The ninja tilted his body forward and accelerated all at once.

However, someone turned around behind him.

He knew the man would pursue him. After all, this enemy had experienced the collapse of his master's clan, so he would do whatever it took to stop an enemy attempting to approach his new master.

For that reason, Tenzou began his run by swinging both arms to throw his coat behind him.

He only had to rob the man of his vision. He only had to slightly obstruct the movement of the gravity swords.

He heard the sound of tearing cloth behind him, but he did not look back.

He felt a chill strike his back from the top left to the bottom right, but he paid it no heed.

He had received yet another wound on his back, but he could tell one thing from the sensation.

...This one is not deep!!

His most precious scar was on his right shoulder blade and this had not cut through it.

“...!!”

The ninja quickly raised his speed.

Tenzou ran.

He ran directly toward the warriors in front of the Tower of London.

Arrows flew toward him and the ether light on their tips proved they had homing spells applied.

The spell was likely a combination of a kinetic detection spell that followed movement and shape and an ether detection spell that followed the target's very existence. Such a spell would be expensive, but this much was to be expected when so close to the queen.

However, Tenzou continued straight ahead.

The flying arrows were drawn to him and he saw them right in front of him.

“!!”

He accelerated his body and used all his strength to throw it down low.

These homing arrows would not lose track of their target for something so simple, but now that he had dropped down, there was something with his lingering scent that retained his form and movement even more than him.

That was his coat that he had thrown into the air behind him.

The black garment had been cut through the back, but it still had the general silhouette of his upper body and it naturally contained traces of his existence because he had been wearing it.

The coat acted as chaff for a homing countermeasure.

...This is an application of what our teacher did with her hair!!

He had changed his silhouette by lowering down, but his coat had retained his shape.

“Judge!”

The dozen arrows shot by over his head.

He ignored the sound of them tearing through the air and threw something toward the warriors as he stood back up.

“A gravity sword!”

It was the one Walter had let go of as Tenzou slipped between his legs.

The warriors would know how powerful a weapon it was. It could cut right through their shield spells.

However, this final group of warriors did not budge.

They were prepared to fight to the death as the last line of defense, so they remained motionless and readied themselves to receive the gravity sword.

...Well done!!

The gravity sword hilt struck one of the shields.

“...!!”

But it did not cut through the shield and it was deflected into the night sky.

It had not been switched on.

That had been the obvious choice for Tenzou, but the enemy had not expected it.

“!?”

Their surprise was as great as their resolve had been.

Tenzou saw the slight disturbance to their breathing. He kicked off the surface of the shield, kicked off the tip of a spear one of them frantically thrust upwards, and continued straight forward from an elevated position.

“Ohhhhhh!!”

As soon as Tenzou’s feet landed on the water of the moat, he began to sprint.

Walking on water was a standard ninja technique, as was running up walls.

However, he wondered what he should do once he climbed the wall.

Even if he was going to confess, he had stupidly failed to prepare anything. And that was despite all the confession advice he had so self-importantly given at Mikawa.

Yet oddly enough, he had always been prepared in the past, but none of his classmates had helped him back then. It was true that was partially related to Musashi’s new policy Horizon had decided on.

...But is that really all?

He did not know what had happened to those who had stayed with him part of the way. They had told him to continue on and not to worry about them.

They had likely wanted to do those things. They might have been using their help as a justification to accomplish something they wanted. They were horrible people, so they might have only wanted to let off some steam or the spring weather might have ignited some kind of destructive urge hidden within them.

But whatever the reason, their actions had brought him to this spot.

In that case, the reason did not matter.

He was exhausted, he was injured, he was bleeding from his back, and he had lost most of his equipment, but he had made it here. He had been brought here.

As he continued in a straight line up the wall, he almost clung to that wall order to avoid some arrows fired from the fortress.

“...!!”

And he arrived.

He was at the top of the northwestern tower. As he stood on the immersion-style Andamio de la Ejecución that was decorated in white, he could see the starry sky and its twin moons.

“ ... ”

He also saw blonde braided hair and an English uniform turning toward him.

He faced the girl and her lips parted as she turned his way.

“Who did you think I was?”

There were no scars on her face or body.

The wind blew.

A girl and boy stood atop a tower with a white sword less than a meter long between them.

The boy glanced toward the courtyard to the right. A waiting area was prepared in the lawn covered by the Tower of London’s shadow. A group of warriors had arrows at the ready there, but someone stood in a chair behind them. She had a scar on her face.

“You can’t!”

Her voice was directed at the ninja. At the same time, the door into the courtyard opened and more warriors appeared. They aimed and drew their bows and more of them lined up atop the fortress and around the moat down below.

“You can’t! I will smooth things over here, so please leave!”

But after hearing the girl shout up from the courtyard, the ninja took in a quiet breath.

He then slowly faced forward.

He took in another deep breath and spoke to the girl who was looking back at him.

“You should stop lying, Mary-dono.”

The girl grew flustered at the name he used.

“But...”

She shook her head, regained the strength in her gaze, and spoke more loudly.

“Why do you say that!?”

“Judge. It is a simple matter. Well, I can guess more or less why you’re doing this.”

He looked at the other girl down below and the scarred girl returned his gaze.

“What are you saying!? She’s dangerous! So...”

“Indeed she is dangerous. After all, I risked my life quite a bit making it this far.”

“What are you-...!?”

“Silence, impostor!!” he shouted.

After pointing at the girl down below, he faced the girl before him.

She jumped and shrank back at his gaze, but he only nodded and spoke.

“Mary-dono has slightly larger breasts!!”

The ninja took a breath and struck a pose. He formed a new pose with each statement.

“A blonde! With! Giant breasts! That is what people call the truth! And that truth will not allow a poor disguise fool me!”

On the now peaceful transport ship deck, Masazumi fed the young anteater on her shoulder and turned her smiling gaze from the sign frame to the Mouse.

“How about we stop watching this!? Right? Right? We can turn it back on in about five minutes, don’t you think!?”

Horizon nodded twice while watching Toori’s sign frame and she spoke to the naked boy next to her.

“I would have thought such a unique skill of perception would be completely useless, but here it is influencing a national decision.”

“Just so you know, the clincher in saving you was my sexual carelessness. Keep that in mind.”

The boy atop the Tower of London heard someone laugh.

The continuing laughter came from the girl in the courtyard waiting area.

No one else knew how to react, but that girl removed the scars on her face and body as if wiping them away.

This revealed the Fairy Queen with her eyebrows raised in a smile. She crossed her legs in her chair.

“Interesting. I never knew there was a clear difference other than the scars. You managed to see through this game that no one else could, so you must be the real deal. Mary, you win the bet. I’ll give you five minutes before your execution.”

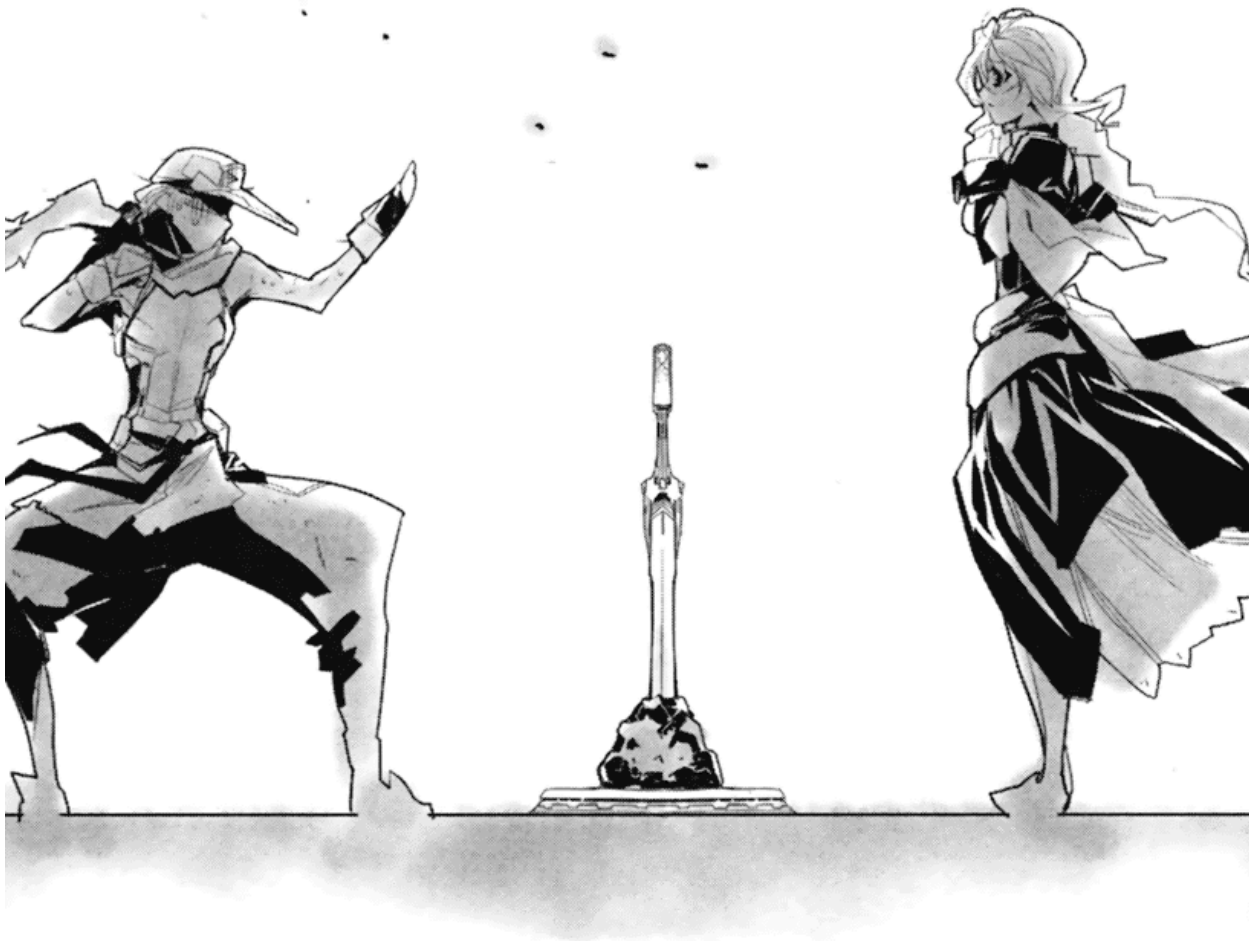
The other girl took a breath and similarly wiped away what was hiding the scar on her...on Mary’s face.

“Five minutes. Enjoy your final stage.”

Chapter 58: Accepted One in the Flower Garden

CHAPTER 58

"Accepted One in the Flower Garden"



How many times in a life
Must you give an answer no matter what that answer is?
Point Allocation (Judge)

How many times in a life

Must you give an answer no matter what that answer is?

Point Allocation (Judge)

Five minutes.

Those words said that England would come to crush Tenzou whether his confession was a success or not, so he sighed.

...Well, it comes down to their circumstances.

However, he had come up with an idea while exchanging opinions with the others earlier.

It was the one and only way of saving Mary.

When he had told the others, Masazumi had told him to try it if he thought it would work, but he would need Mary's help. Above all, he needed her to choose to live.

At any rate, that was the reason for his confession. A moment before he had called her "Mary-dono" without thinking, but...

...That's fine, isn't it? Isn't it? It's a natural progression!!

"M-Mary-dono!"

"Y-yes! Judge!"

Tenzou had decided to clearly expressing his feelings first and then give his reasoning. That was an essay-writing technique. And so he clearly shouted his thoughts.

"I...I llove you!!"

He stumbled over the word.

Asama: “It ended as soon as it began. Well, I guess he has no regrets now.”

Me: “Aren’t you being a little harsh, Asama? Of course, I managed to confess just fine.”

Gold Mar: “Is it just me or has a certain someone done a lot of unnecessary damage to people’s lives during this stay in England?”

Asama: “Are you referring to me!? You are, aren’t you!? Aren’t you!?”

...Wh-what have I done!?

At the center of attention, an unpleasantly warm sweat covered Tenzou.

He had stumbled over the word because, at the last second, he had hesitated over whether to go all out and say “love” or be more conservative and say “like”. However, the reason did not matter. He needed to follow through somehow.

...U-um, she grew flowers didn’t she? Those were...

“Th-that is to say, I think you are as beautiful as a lily! A water lily!!”

Mal-Ga: “Huh? He’s still at it?”

Worshipper: “A-aren’t you pretty close to there!? Try to actually watch it!”

—Vice President has entered.

Vice President: “Hey, this is my first time in the divine chat on my own. If I do anything wrong, just tell me.”

Almost Everyone: “Oh, congrats, congrats.”

Asama: “Um, we really should be watching. I’m starting to feel bad for him.”

That was pushing it, wasn’t it!? thought Tenzou.

But Mary suddenly brought her hands to her slightly flushed cheeks.

“What color of water lily? Red or white?”

“Eh?”

He was unsure what to say, but her red cheeks just about made him answer red.

...But the red shows up so much because of how white her skin is.

And he recalled that was the color of water lily she had grown.

“I-I’ll have the white!!”

Noriki: “Is he talking about wine now?”

Flat Vassal: “I-I popped in here to take a break, but this is getting pretty serious!”

Asama: “But why did she ask about the color? I’ll look into it a bit.”

Novice: “I don’t know... Oh, this is Neshinbara. Um, I don’t know about the colors, but this is pretty interesting. After all, in stories, water lilies are closely related to fairies.”

Wise Sister: “Now, it’s time for tonight’s super nerdy talk time.”

Novice: “I ignored that after two seconds. Anyway, there’s a certain story about water lilies. Supposedly, a fairy will transform into one when it is pursued by a

demon. For that reason, if you don't pluck the water lily with a blade, you will be cursed by the demon hiding in the flower's shadow and waiting for the fairy to leave. Also, Latin for water lily is Nymphaea. In other words, the nymph flower."

Gold Mar: "The nymph is an M.H.R.R. fairy, isn't it?"

Novice: "Yes. The Normans who conquered England had the same origins as the Germanic tribes who later became M.H.R.R. Their mixture with England's Celtic non-humans created the people you see now."

Wise Sister: "Heh heh heh. It may be wrong for me to say it, but how about you take a look at the scene now?"

Tenzou saw Mary hold her flushed cheeks with both hands.

However, she closed her eyes and shook her head.

"We can't!"

"Ehh!? I'm being turned down after all this!? I knew it!"

Silver Wolf: "Couldn't he at least say 'How can this be?' or 'You have to be kidding!' even if it's just for show?"

Smoking Girl: "Really, it was out of the question from the moment he misspoke at the very beginning. I'm impressed he made it this far after that."

Mal-Ga: "Do you even have to get to the misspeaking? Hiding his face while confessing makes it out of the question with his very existence."

Me: "Oh, dear. The judgments are coming in from all the referees. This game isn't looking good for Tenzou. But you've still got some moves left to play, so let's make it work even if you have to force it. Right, Tenzou?"

“After all,” said Mary while raising her eyebrows and lowering her hands. “We have to carry out the history recreation! I’ve worked so hard for this execution!”

Tenzou listened.

“A lot of other people have worked toward it as well. People have died and I’ve even killed people to get here! Three hundred people were killed by Bloody Mary! And after that, the two Marys brought chaos to the country and there were people who would have survived had that not happened!”

She continued speaking.

“I have a duty to sacrifice myself here!”

“No, you do not!”

Tenzou shouted back completely on reflex.

...Oh, no.

He realized what he had said only afterwards and the shout had been loud enough to make Mary’s shoulder’s jump a bit and make the warriors positioned around them and down below freeze in place. However, the Fairy Queen down below remained calm.

“You are intervening in our internal affairs.”

That may have been true, but he knew one thing for sure.

“Does England refer to people’s deaths as politics?”

This was something they had all confirmed at Mikawa.

“The people of the Far East wish to save anyone who is facing an unreasonable death,” he said. “And we will not force ourselves to view everything in a positive way and insist that such a death is salvation!!”

But a moment later, the Fairy Queen spoke with her eyebrows still raised in a smile.

“You are too naïve, Far Easterner!! That is the way of the world!! Life and death and even the offense and defense of a nation are nothing more than cards for politics! By recreating history, we have turned even war and history into bargaining chips!”

“Then...”

He said what their leader had said in Mikawa and what they had double-checked before leaving for London.

“Then we will conquer this world and change how it works!”

He then faced forward and spoke to Mary.

“I, Tenzou Crossunite, will assist the Far East’s world domination and take on the role of watching over Double Bloody Mary!”

“Eh? B-but if I don’t die...”

“That does not matter! If we are to eventually conquer the world, England is nothing but a bonus!! The Far East will be the entire world! We are not far from there! All that remains is conquering the entire world!”

I’m running completely on momentum, he realized.

...This is the same as making stupidly large boasts with Toori-dono and the others.

I can leave the responsibility for this commitment to the vice president, he decided as a way of escaping the situation.

“No matter who died or was injured for your sake and even if you had the option to die, you are under no obligation to die! Now choose!”

“Ch-choose what!?”

“The people who expected something of you may speak ill of you in their disappointment, but you have the right to live in this world with no interference from anyone else!!”

“Why?” The corners of Mary’s mouth twisted. “Why would you say that!?”

“Because I do not want to lose you!”

“B-but...” She covered her twisting expression with her hands. “I’m...covered in so many scars.”

“I don’t care!”

“I’m an indecent woman who has married and divorced several times for the history recreation!”

“I don’t care!!”

“You might make an enemy of everyone in England!”

“I don’t care!!! I know someone who has made an enemy of the entire world!!!”

He took a breath.

“I would never have appeared before you if I wasn’t prepared to at least bear the weight of England!”

“B-but...”

“Enough! If I steal you away, any supposed responsibility of yours will mean nothing!!”

What a troublesome person, he thought.

But...

...She was proud that she was sacrificing herself.

He was telling her to cast all that aside and come with him, so of course she would refuse.

That was why he made up his mind.

Whether it was a bluff, just for show, or a lie, he could say it here.

Even if he had to lie, he would bring her back alive.

He wanted to take her with him and spend his days working to live up to her pride and everything else about her. This was a soul attempting to support all of England and he wanted her to turn toward him.

“Even if you refuse and resist, I *will* steal you away!”

This was Phylargia. He wanted her to the extent that he would do anything and everything to get her.

And so he spoke.

“As long as I have you by my side, your scars, your marriages, and making an enemy of England are all irrelevant! As long as I don’t lose you, nothing else matters! Even if we lose our bodies of flesh and we remain as nothing but souls, as long as you are with me in the end, it does not matter! And I will become a ninja worthy of that!”

“B-but...”

Mary clenched her fists and swung them down as she cried out.

“Then why didn’t you kiss me when we parted before!?”

Vice President: “That idiot caused an international incident all the way back then?”

Me: “But wasn’t it the lack of the kiss that made it harder to cut their ties?”

Mal-Ga: “And instead he got penetrated. I’ll have this storyboard done in no time!!”

Uqui: “But how is he supposed to respond? There’s nothing he can say if she insists he wasn’t serious because he didn’t kiss her.”

Almost Everyone: “I guess it’s over then.”

Me: “C’mon, that’s pretty pessimistic, everyone! Damn! I-I’m not gonna let you outdo me!”

Tenzou was certain those horrible people were having an ominous conversation on the divine network, but he was too busy sweating at what Mary had said.

...Sh-she’s exactly right!

Before his eyes, she almost seemed to be throwing a tantrum.

“I...! I...! I stretched up as much as I could back then! But...but you didn’t react, so I thought you had rejected me and tried to at least look good as we parted ways! You can’t come back now and try to turn that around!! If you wanted to draw me in this much, why didn’t you kiss me back then!?”

Her shouting seemed to explode in front of him.

“I made up my mind and settled all my feelings back then!”

“Tenzou! Lie!!”

Tenzou saw a divine text from Toori.

“It doesn’t have to make sense! Just come up with a reason why you didn’t kiss her! If you do that, you’ve won! Do you understand!? She wants you to convince her!!”

Yes, thought Tenzou as he recalled Mikawa. This must be where she and I are parallel.

But Toori had sent more text.

“Asama did a quick search on the divine network about water lilies. Do you know the language of flowers? Well, a red water lily means an innocent heart, kindness, trust, purity, or faith, so it’s pretty stiff and formal. But...”

But...

“The white water lily means pure or innocent. Do you get what that means? She’s about to be executed, but you called her white. It doesn’t matter if it’s a lie or whatever else, just change her black guilt into white innocence. Even if you’re wearing black, show off a bit of white.”

“Judge!”

Tenzou nodded and faced Mary once more.

She stood on the other side of Ex. Caliburn and he took a step toward her.

That step brought him within arm’s reach of her. Once he looked at her again, he saw she was on the verge of tears yet also had an urging upturned look to her eyes.

And for that reason, he nodded again.

“In the Far East, a careless kiss is strictly forbidden! After all...”

It did not matter if it was a lie.

“A kiss symbolizes a promise of marriage!”

For a moment, Mary was overcome by confusion.

...Eh!?

She glanced down toward her sister as if to ask if it was true, but that sister was averting her gaze toward the subordinates to her side. That left Mary with no way to know.

...I-if that's true...

She might have asked him something extremely inappropriate under the Far East's rules that would be the future rules for the entire world.

But...

“B-but in that case...! Did you not kiss me because you don't want to marry me!?”

Even as she spoke, she wanted to cry. After all, that was what it would mean that he had not kissed her.

“So why didn't you kiss me!?”

“It is a simple matter.”

Tenzou's voice now came from directly in front of her. He lightly crossed his arms and raised his right index finger.

“I still had my doubts back then. I wanted you very badly, but I had not tested to see whether you were fully qualified!”

“Qu-qualified?”

What kind of test was it? Was there some kind of strict series of questions a person had to answer before they could get married in the Far East? She had heard that Far Eastern society was based in academic ability. In that case, she might be unqualified due to her poor grasp of the Far Eastern language.

“Wh-what do I have to do!?”

“Judge. It is simple. First, take in a deep breath.”

“Judge.”

She hurriedly spread her arms and took in a deep breath.

Just as she wondered what would happen, his hands firmly grasped her breasts as if pressing in from the side and lifting them up.

Eh? she thought while he lowered his head, paused, and took in a breath.

“Aaaaaaaaaccepted!!”

Tenzou was reluctant to remove his hands, so he kept them in place while he spoke. Mary’s surprised face was beet red and he now managed to speak boldly.

“You meet the requirements of my faith!! It was because I had not checked on this that I could not kiss you back then!”

“Th-then...”

“Judge,” he said. He was determined to say what he should have said from the beginning. “Mary-dono, I...”

He would say it clearly.

“I lilove you.”

He clearly stumbled over the word.

All motion and noise came to a stop.

Even the distant battle between the Musashi and Tres España stopped for some reason.

In the silence and motionlessness, Mary thought.

...I should lie right now, shouldn't I?

For the first time, she would lie for her own sake. And it took only a single word.



Mary

“Judge.”

She would act as if she had heard it properly.

And so she continued with a trembling mouth.

“And I love you!”

Tenzou heard a response to his confession and he saw flowers. They appeared around Mary’s back as she held her hands to her cheeks.

...Ether flowers?

According to Masazumi and the others, giant wing-like flower petals had bloomed from the Fairy Queen’s back, but Mary’s did not simply come from her back. They were almost too large to wrap ones arm around and they filled the area behind her and around her.

...These are water lilies.

White water lilies were blooming. First five, then ten, twenty, and even thirty.

“Eh? Oh, um, uh...”

She looked utterly confused as a flower field filled the area as if enveloping her and him.

The blooming white water lilies were all missing or dropping their petals. They were imperfect, but they were indeed opening.

“U-um...”

Mary gave him a troubled look from the center of the flowers.

She pulled a single long cloth from her pocket. It was a red scarf meant to be worn around the neck.

It seemed to have been knit recently. Tenzou realized the scarf fluttering behind him was on the verge of falling apart after everything he had experienced on his way here, so he let go of her breasts and spread his arms.

“Come here.”

Mary went.

With Ex. Caliburn between them, she moved into the hands and arms that had been holding her breasts.

“Master Tenzou!”

While half drawn toward him, she leaped into his arms. After a pause, his arms awkwardly wrapped around her back and waist.

But Mary wanted him to touch her more and to deepen the embrace, so she twisted her body around. She bent back, pressed the two targets of his faith against him, and wrapped the red scarf around his neck from behind.

“Master Tenzou, I lost.”

She closed her eyes, raised her chin, and stretched her head upwards.

“I have lost as well. I was never trained in how to kiss through a scarf.”

After a slight sound of scraping cloth, their lips met. She ignored how he went in too strongly and made their teeth clink together.

I will become a more selfish girl, thought Mary. I will become a horrible girl who is honest to her desires and abandons the people who have been so devoted to her for so long. And even if people talk about me behind my back or insult me – and I’m sure they will – I will work to remain a terrible girl and to remain aware of what I am doing.

Even if she was constantly criticized, her answer was to live on and gain her own happiness.

If she could blossom such that she supported this person who would help conquer the world, that was enough.

So in order to grow even closer, she traced her fingers along his back to feel the scars there and she held the scars on her own, chest, arms, cheek, and everywhere else against him as they exchanged breaths.

...How strange.

When we embrace, my scars are hidden while it looks like his scars are protecting me.

But as she stroked his back, she found the scar that had indeed protected her.

Finally, their lips parted, she gave one last reluctant peck, and she spoke.

“Master Tenzou.”

“What is it?”

She found it odd that he had already wrapped the new scarf around his face, but that was just who he was.

Rather than truly asking, she asked for confirmation.

“Will you scar me?”

“Judge. If you will bear that scar with pride.”

“Judge,” she answered with a slight smile and a large nod despite the tears spilling from the corners of her eyes.

“Judge,” he replied with a nod of his own.

He pulled her to him and to the other side of Excalibur and she understood why.

There was a great presence behind them.

“Mary, your show is over.”

The Fairy Queen had climbed to the top of the Andamio de la Ejecución.

Chapter 59: King on the Tower

CHAPTER 59

"King on the Tower"



Is loneliness
Truly a necessary requirement for that existence?
Point Allocation (Excalibur)

Is loneliness

Truly a necessary requirement for that existence?

Point Allocation (Excalibur)

From the deck of the transport ship, Masazumi saw light in the northern sky.

She recognized its color, shape, and bright splendor.

“Is that the Fairy Queen’s light wings!?”

Me: “Whelp, he’s about to be burnt to cinders.”

Asama: “Wh-why are you being so pessimistic!? Tenzou-kun is at the peak of his life right now! Everything’s downhill from here, so how about we congratulate him for the moment!?”

Almost Everyone: “I think we’ve found someone even more pessimistic!!”

Asama: “B-but he’s clearly about to be burnt to cinders!!”

Me: “Don’t be so pessimistic, Asama! Tenzou’s at the peak of his life right now!”

...Don’t get into a reverse loop.

At any rate, the situation had grown dangerous. Masazumi had something to announce, but she had lost her timing.

However, she sensed emotion in the Fairy Queen’s reaction.

...Is this a mixture of love and hate?

Did she hate Mary or not? If she really did, she would not want to approach her, but she was using her own power to face them.

“That shows just how much she doesn’t want Mary to leave.”

Masazumi nodded as she muttered to herself.

“You must have a plan to avoid Mary’s execution. Take the gamble, Crossunite.”

The Fairy Queen walked toward Tenzou with her wings fully open in the night sky.

He had difficulty perceiving her movements, but there was a reason for that.

...She isn’t really walking. Is she having the air spirits and other spirits carry her!?

Her movement was not quite calm and not quite bold. She simply had her very location move her forward and in front of Tenzou and Mary.

She was shorter than Tenzou, but she still found a way to look down on him.

Mary firmly pressed against him, so he held her in his left arm and chest.

He then faced the Fairy Queen.

He felt intimidated, but not frightened.

For some reason, her breasts seemed lacking.

That single point allowed him to hold back his fear. He knew there was something the Fairy Queen lacked.

However, the queen placed both hands on Ex. Caliburn.

“Let me ask you this, Mary. How will you take responsibility for abandoning everything?”

“Judge,” replied the flower in her heart. Mary took a nervous breath before continuing. “I will not forget and I will make up it as much as I can. However, I no longer desire death.”

“You wish to repay us!? We will demand a massive amount!”

“Master Tenzou and I can work hard to pay it back!”

...Ehhhhhh!? We have to pay back an amount on the level of a national industry!?

A sudden image of his money-loving classmate putting together a high interest rate loan entered his mind, but it was interrupted by the Fairy Queen.

“I see.”

...Wait! Um, that settled it!? For real!?

However, the conversation continued on that assumption. The Fairy Queen lowered her shoulders and opened her mouth.

“So you insist on choosing life even if it means breaking your promise with me?”

What a quiet question, thought Tenzou.

It was almost as if...

...Is she crying?

He felt as if she did not want Mary to go and was relying on her. Nevertheless, her gaze was sharp.

“Well?”

Tenzou did not turn to Mary and did not try to urge her to do anything. They had already exchanged words and body heat, so he trusted in her and she did not turn toward him either.

“I have not forgotten,” she said. She lowered her head but quickly looked back up at her sister while trembling. “There is something I was planning to tell you when I was executed.”

She let out the words with a great tremor in her breath.

“Sorry I can’t protect you anymore.”

“...!?”

Tenzou saw the Fairy Queen’s expression clearly. Her scolding look changed to slight surprise and then resignation, but it finally passed through regret, her eyes closed, her eyebrows rose, she took in a breath, and she forcefully opened her mouth.

“Do not mock me, Double Bloody Mary! I am the Fairy Queen!”

She then turned a sharp look in Tenzou’s direction.

“Luring in a fairy with sweet words is exactly what I would expect from a cowardly Far Easterner. But once a fairy has descended to the lands of men, it can no longer return to the forest. Just as the mermaid turns to foam, I will pluck the water lily here. If you are with that ninja, I am sure you will have a happy slumber even if he is only deceiving you.”

Elizabeth gathered strength in the hands on Excalibur, but Tenzou called out to her.

“W-wait! I would like to ask one thing.”

“I will not listen to your sweet words!”

Please, he thought with all his heart as he shouted out.

“Try saying that that again after Mary-dono draws Excalibur!”

“Eh!?”

That voice of surprise came from Mary rather than Elizabeth.

Tenzou saw her look up at him from his arm with her eyebrows lowered.

“B-but I wasn’t able to draw Excalibur.”

“You were using the wrong method.”

“The wrong method!? The king can draw it. That is all there is to it!”

“Let me say one thing.”

He judged the expression before his eyes, Elizabeth’s hands holding Ex. Caliburn, and the strength gathered in them. He kept in mind that a single wrong step would spell their doom in this delicate situation.

“Fairy Queen, do you know the method to pull three hundred swords from the ground?”

The two girls gave different responses to that question. One opened her eyes wide and the other frowned. Mary took a definite breath within his arm and spoke.

“Master Tenzou.”

She pressed up against him and held her hands forward.

“I trust you.”

He responded by holding out his hands as well and grabbing Ex. Caliburn’s hilt along with her. Their hands were placed atop Elizabeth’s so she cried out.

“Enough lying!!”

A moment later, light burst into the night.

Just before Ex. Caliburn's sword of light was fired, Tenzou saw white light fill the blade.

"I beseech you, sword of England's protection!!"

He spoke as if letting out a roar.

"Oh sword given by the spirits yet later broken, show yourself for the one who will protect England!"

This is a gamble, thought Tenzou.

He had heard that Henry VIII had boasted that he could draw Excalibur.

He had heard that Henry VIII had researched compressed space and the Apocalypse.

And he had heard about the storage system for Horizon's Logismoi Oplo.

All of that had led him to think up this gamble.

Excalibur was not using England's crust as its scabbard.

"It is in a space of spirits! Excalibur, be drawn from your ley line scabbard for the protector of England!!"

As Mary heard Tenzou's shout, she also felt him tug on her hands.

In Ex. Caliburn's light, his palms enveloped her hands and guided them forward into the light.

It seemed like a good way to have your hands blown off, but Mary did not see it that way.

...I trust Master Tenzou!

With that thought in her heart, she moved with Tenzou and plunged her hands into the light as a counter.

“...!!”

An instant later, Ex. Caliburn’s light exploded at the top of the tower.

Despite the light, the blast of wind, the disappearance, and the rush of chilly night air, Elizabeth did not draw back.

She merely stared intently at what lay in her hands.

It was Ex. Caliburn.

The full sword had been drawn from its crust scabbard and she held it in her hands. It was over a meter long as she held it up, but her voice was filled with surprise and suspicion.

“I drew it!?”

However, there was more than the long, sharp sword in her hands.

“What is that!?”

She turned toward the confused look on Mary’s face and the two giant swords in her hands.

It was a single large sword that had been split in two.

They floated in the air a bit and were about a meter and a half in length. The two single-edged swords were made to connect back-to-back and form a single double-edged sword.

The swords looked like flower petals or wings and Mary held them with a look of utter confusion.

While holding them backhanded, she set them on her left and right hips as if urged on by their weight. Once the floating white swords gained their proper position, gold lines of light pulsed through them a few times.

The black figure standing behind her then nodded in the wind.

“This is Ex. Collbrande.”

Mary gasped as she listened to Tenzou’s words while he supported her back.

“Listen. Ex. Collbrande was given to England by the fairies yet it was broken, so the only place to repair it was the world of spirits. In other words, in the ley lines. Also, Ex. Caliburn was given to England from that world of spirits, so....”

Elizabeth held up Ex. Caliburn and shouted as if finishing for him.

“Are you saying Ex. Caliburn was a key to where Collbrande was stored!? And it would only show itself once the king drew Caliburn’s blade toward him or herself!?”

“Judge. After all, that introduces a contradiction. What happens if the sword that determines the king is drawn toward that king?”

With those words, Elizabeth realized what her strike had caused.

“Drawing the sword toward the king. That is the ceremony for dedicating a sword to the king.”

“Judge,” answered the ninja. “Chancellor Henry VIII was researching ley lines, so I guessed he had realized this. However, he likely saw no need for two swords and decided to leave them for his two daughters.”

The dark figure spoke clearly.

“And now the two Excaliburs have been drawn. What will England do with the two who have been deemed worthy of being its king!?”

Elizabeth gasped at what the ninja meant.

Mary's failure to succeed the throne due to being unable to draw Ex. Caliburn was part of the reason for her execution. Having her draw Collbrande weakened their justification for the execution.

After all, Mary was indeed carrying the two pieces of Ex. Collbrande at her waist.

...She was chosen as the owner of that royal sword.

Perhaps for that reason, Caliburn had withdrawn its power in Elizabeth's hand.

Collbrande had done the same. They seemed to be saying they would not battle each other.

“Kh.”

Elizabeth tried to decide what to do, but she heard a voice before she could.

“Fairy Queen! This is Honda Masazumi, Vice President of Musashi Ariadust Academy! I would like to propose a truce!”

“A truce!? And what conditions do you suggest to reconcile our positions!?”

The Fairy Queen demanded an answer from the voice leaving the sign frame the ninja held up.

“I could say that Double Bloody Mary is ruining the execution so many resources and so much manpower were spent on and that she is now attempting to steal the throne!”

“Then to protect your throne from her, Musashi requests that Mary be exiled to the Far East!”

For a moment, she did not understand what that meant.

...Exiled!?

“You fool! And what about the execution!? How will you make up for those costs!?”

“Mary can repay you in the greatest way! Fairy Queen, surely you know what I mean.”

Elizabeth indeed realized what she meant.

...So that's it!

“Are you bringing the history recreation into this, Musashi!?”

“Judge. That's right, Fairy Queen Elizabeth. If we are to obey the Testament descriptions, you will name the king of Scotland as the next king of England. And that king will be your nephew. In other words, you will name Mary's orphan as the next king.”

The voice on the divine transmission called someone else's name.

“Crossunite, the child born between you and Mary will be the next king of England.”

“Mary will escape her execution, but she will ensure England's continued survival. Doesn't that seem like enough of a repayment? Rather than having her protect England with her death, the Far East wishes to support her ability to protect England by giving birth to new life.”

Masazumi's announcement brought a quiet sweat to Tenzou.

...Yeah, if you'd told me that beforehand, the pressure would definitely have made me stumble all over my lines!

But next to him, Mary brought her hands to her heat-filled cheeks and turned to him.

“What should we do?”

That was not even a question. There was nothing to do but escape the situation alive.

...That's a lot of responsibility for me!!

“Crossunite, if the Fairy Queen refuses, make sure you make it back alive and bring Mary with you. I will handle everything after that. I am ordering you with my authority as vice president. Now, Mary. Do you wish to be exiled to the Far East? That is, do you wish to transfer schools?”

“Judge!”

That quick decision led Tenzou to glance not at Mary but at Elizabeth.

...Wow. She is really, really mad.

He was glad the Excaliburs had a safety setting preventing them from attacking each other.

...Otherwise, she would undoubtedly kill me and only me.

But rescue soon arrived.

He heard a rumbling and a roar of wind from low in the southern sky. A high-speed transport ship from the Musashi had arrived with a rope ladder hanging down.

The others who had fought in London were likely already onboard. Even if the queen rejected Masazumi's offer, it would not be too difficult for the approaching transport ship to take Mary away.

However, Tenzou saw the Fairy Queen lower her head and clench her back teeth.

Excalibur hung carelessly down from her hand and her fingers had grown pale.

“Why?”

Mary answered the quiet question with a smile and the ends of her eyebrows lowered.

“Once you die, you will understand. It was thanks to you that I made it this far. And now it is my turn to kill you. Kill you by having a child who will take your place.”

So...

“Once that happens, let’s play together again. We can play in our own Avalon on the other side of death. But until then, we must say goodbye, Fairy Queen. This is London, city of the Fairy Queen. A lowly spirit that desired a human cannot remain here even if she continues to dream.”

She looked at Tenzou.

“I will live in a human city so that I can protect your dream. Elizabeth, you are half of me and my precious sister.”

The wind blew in and the rope ladder dangled down from the transport ship. Tenzou wrapped an arm around Mary’s waist as he prepared to grab the ladder.

In that instant, Elizabeth took a step toward them and let out a shout.

“Sister!”

The response came with lowered ends of the eyebrows and a teary-eyed smile.

“Thank you.”

With those two words, Tenzou’s vision flew into the London night.

He surrounded himself with the transport ship’s rescue.

As he left, Tenzou saw a certain sight. He saw some figures to the east of the Tower of London's courtyard. They stood unnoticed far behind all the people watching him and Mary fly into the western sky.

...A headless woman, a lady, and...

He saw approximately three hundred men there. The headless woman, the lady, and all the others were colored a bluish-white and partially transparent.

The headless woman and the lady next to her lightly waved in Tenzou and Mary's direction and the men nodded.

...Are those the ghosts said to be in the Tower of London and the people of the graveyard?

But before he could check, his vision quickly rose.

The Tower of London was now far below him.

He could only see the Fairy Queen standing on the tower's Andamio de la Ejecución.

As for the precious person in his arm...

"Please don't look at me."

He knew what she meant. The fairy sisters had a faint synchronization of minds. That was why their parting had turned out as it had despite what they had gone through and they could likely still sense each other's emotions.

Because he understood that, he pressed her crying face into his chest.

"Do not worry," he said. "Looking at you is never a mistake."

With that said, he looked up into the night sky. The transport ship was not moving south or east. It was travelling west where the armada battle was reaching its end.

However...

“Is that...?”

Tenzou realized that the naval battle was not going to end quite yet.

On the ship's narrow bridge, Segundo realized the battle was coming to its end.

There were no unharmed ships around him and they were taking more fire than they were giving back.

The wheel formations had lost their shape and a lot of ships had been damaged. The rotation was continuing, but that was only to avoid colliding with the other ships.

All he could do now was order the other ships to evacuate and shift the battle into retreat.

The elderly man acting as second in command on Segundo's ship spoke up.

“The buoyancy on the back starboard side is in the red zone! Commander! We need to withdraw as well!”

At those words, Segundo sat in the command chair he had not sat in once since the battle began. From there, he checked on the Musashi visible through the window on the fifteen square meter bridge.

“So history remains unchanged.”

He had created a situation ideal for a frenzied battle and advanced his game pieces. The Musashi's senses were still knocked out by the spell charm chaff and the Musashi's first and second port and starboard ships had had their surface armor and surface weaponry destroyed. Anti-fortress stakes had been driven into the ships at a few points and most of the eight ships had fires and the glowing smoke of leaking ether fuel rising from them somewhere.

He doubted the enemy's internal frames could withstand extended use of their gravitational cruising, so that ability had been almost entirely taken from them until they underwent large-scale repairs.

Overall, it had taken a significant amount of damage.

But even after all that, the Musashi had not been sunk.

Why was that?

There were a number of reasons people could give. The most common one would likely be Tres España's poor performance. But to put it in terms of the Musashi's performance...

...They used their disadvantage.

The ships' unified senses had been taken, so they had controlled the ships separately. They had also used the noncombatant trade ships as movable barriers, the different types of spell users had been positioned at the optimal points, and they had overall worked as a team.

...That was...

"Musashi's own system for a frenzied battle."

The sparks and smoke cut off his view of the enemy beyond the shellfire being exchanged.

However, he knew that Far Eastern students had an upper age limit of eighteen years. Everyone beyond those flames of war would be young. They would be the same age as his own fighters' children.

...Are they giving this their all?

As he wondered that, the ship shook from a hit. The deck seemed to push up against him and he heard his second in command's voice.

"Commander!"

“Testament. Prepare to withdraw all forces. Also open a channel to the other ships.”

Segundo looked at the sea chart on the central table.

They were already arriving in the ocean southwest of England, so the history recreation of the armada battle was just about over.

...The Testament descriptions say the retreating battle began after we created a defensive formation in the ocean southeast of England.

He then raised his right hand and spoke.

“All ships are to retreat from the battlefield and return to our nation on the route designated to you.”

He took a breath.

“We will end the armada battle here.”

The crew of the Musashi and those working on its deck noticed the Grande y Felicísima Armada’s movement.

The entire battered fleet dismantled its uneven wheel formations and...

“They’re descending!”

The enemy lowered. They aimed their cannons upwards or, if they could not, they covered the barrels with white cloth.

“Is it over?”

Smoke rose into the night air as the fleet of small ships descended. The Musashi understood what that meant, so everyone was instructed to cease firing.

They could see a lot of abandoned ships. Dozens of ships sank while spewing fire and smoke because their fuel or engine had been taken out. Their crews had already moved over to less damaged ships which were all descending.

They may have been warships, but they were only old, small models that had been modified for one last use. Most likely, simply circling England had brought a lot of them to their limit.

Just as everyone breathed a sigh of relief, someone suddenly pointed into the sky.

“Hey, look.”

A white automatic galley had been located at the center of the wheel formation that had rotated between Musashino and Tama. It was not spewing smoke from its starboard side, but it was not descending. That one ship remained in the sky.

That lone ship slowly and surely grew more distant as the Musashi left it behind.

“Isn’t that Segundo’s ship?” asked a doubtful voice.

In that instant, the white galley exploded in empty air.

With nothing around it as the even the Musashi pulled away, Segundo’s ship fell to pieces while spilling smoke.

“Eh?”

It had destroyed itself, but why would it do so when the battle was supposedly already over?

The confused people watched as a figure came into view.

A single middle-aged man was visible on the burning, crumbling, and slanting deck.

It was Segundo.

Chapter 60: Postwar Approval

CHAPTER 60

"Postwar Approval"



If you say the past is important
And look only behind you
What happens to the present?

Point Allocation (Looking Back)

If you say the past is important

And look only behind you

What happens to the present?

Point Allocation (Looking Back)

“You idiots! Why would you leave the commander!?”

A scuffle had begun on the deck of one large ship within the descending Tres Españan fleet.

They had already reached the ocean surface far below, but one white galley was spewing flames into the heavens while too high for them to reach.

It was Segundo’s ship and he alone remained onboard.

The other crew of the ship had boarded another ship to evacuate and that ship’s crew and the evacuees from other ships were confronting them.

“What are you doing!? Why would you leave him on a sinking ship!? And why did he destroy his own ship!?”

“We didn’t leave him! He said he wanted to descend on his own ship, so he sent us on ahead.”

The elderly generation and the middle-aged generation glared at each other and pointed up into the sky.

“He said he had forgotten something. You laughed when you heard it too, didn’t you!? You cracked a joke about how our commander hasn’t changed! That’s why you saluted to say you had his back!”

The surrounding people were left speechless at that and the other nearby people began to shout.

“We want to ask why...why he would remove us from the game board as much as you do!” He took in a breath. “We want to tell him the rules of the game don’t allow giving up by sinking your own ship!!”

Segundo sat cross-legged on the sinking ship’s deck.

The galley had caught fire. The other men who had descended ahead of him seemed to have noticed, but it was too late. The small-scale explosions caused by the fuel had already reached the inside of the ship and ether fuel was leaking from the bow of the ship as a mist. The buoyancy of the bow had risen, so the ship would eventually burn up or explode with the stern sinking down.

Even if the other men tried to return from below, they would not arrive in time.

Through the shimmering heat, he gave a nod to the now distant Musashi and his comrades down below.

“I’m sorry, but I have to let the world see this.”

This was not a part of the history recreation and it went against the Testament descriptions.

“I must show them that Tres España is willing to die and oppose the Testament descriptions when we have an objective we must achieve. If I do this as the old generation, those of the new generation can use it as a diplomatic card. They can threaten to use the same methods as ‘that foolish chancellor’.”

In other words...

“When the king vanishes, the game board is reset. I must make myself into ‘the old king’.”

Between him and the distant Musashi was the galley’s ram.

“We didn’t ram anyone or use the bow cannon here.”

He thought back to twenty-five years ago.

According to the Testament descriptions, the Tres Españan galleys used their rams against the Ottoman fleet in the Battle of Lepanto. In the recreation, that meant using the ships' rams and bow cannons to destroy the Ottoman fleet threatening the Mediterranean Sea.

However, the history recreation had not been followed. The Ottoman fleet had had armored ships meant to form a wall in the center of their fleet and thus protect their primary force, but they had sent them forward to receive the galleys' rams. Once the galleys had been stopped, the armored ships had been used in place of a fortress and the other ships had performed a pincer attack from the outside. The Tres Españan fleet had been outnumbered and unable to retreat due to their ramming tactic. They had still put up a fight, but...

...We were almost entirely wiped out. We sunk a lot of the Ottomans, but all of them but the armored ones were old-style ships.

The Ottomans had used the Battle of Lepanto to get rid of the old ships they had needed to replace anyway and that was how it had turned out.

Segundo thought back to what he had done back then.

The others had charged forward on the higher ups' orders, but he had sensed something odd about the enemy formation and had lingered behind.

It was often said that he had survived the battle, but the truth was that he had not fought at all.

“But my comrades back then always said I was weak and that I had nothing going for me but my family.”

For that reason, he had told himself that he had always lingered behind and that battle had been nothing out of the ordinary in that regard.

However, the consequences had been unavoidable.

He had not been lost, but so many others had.

“On the battlefield, they would smile and tell me to leave it to them.”

Before leaving for war his wife had told him...

“ ‘We would be in trouble if you weren’t like that.’ ”

So...

“I’m sorry. And I even promised to go to the *falla* together after I got back from the Lepanto.”

He lowered his head and spoke within the shaking and the sounds of the ship’s self-destruction.

“I’m sorry, everyone.”

He thought of a certain girl who had grown up wonderfully.

...I gave her nothing but painful memories, didn’t I?

He heard the flames reach the bridge behind him. The heat reached his back and the ship tilted all at once. The engine had likely been taken out and the buoyancy would be lost soon. But at the same time...

“This will mean the end of those painful memories.”

He no longer cared about himself, so he called out to someone else instead.

“Juana.”

And he received a sudden reply.

“Did you call for me, chancellor?”

Segundo looked at the person standing before him.

She stood on the shaking deck between him and the Musashi which remained on its departing trajectory.

“Juana!?”

“Testament. I am here to retrieve you with the San Martín.”

She gave a definite nod in the shimmering heat and sparks.

“What do you need, chancellor?”

Juana had replied to the call of the man sitting before her, but...

...What am I supposed to do now?

She hesitated. After all, he had attempted to abandon everything, including his own life. It was nothing but complete desperation, but she understood that he had his own reasons in mind.

His past letters had given her a hint that he was keeping his distance from everything current.

She understood that anything she said here would not mesh with his current line of thinking, so she decided to not say anything more than necessary.

...Yes. Just for the moment, I need to avoid my usual harsh responses.

“Juana?”

She reflexively replied as usual when he interrupted her thoughts.

“Please be silent, chancellor. I am trying to-...”

...Oh, no!!

On the surface, she remained expressionless, but on the inside, she turned her back and ran about three steps away. When she hesitantly looked back at the man,

he had the expression of someone waiting to be scolded. He was telling her to hurry it up.

...G-good. Thank goodness!

“Now, chancellor, let us return. The others have come to get you.”

Juana silently sighed at how she made it sound like she did not approve of it.

...Why did I turn into such a disagreeable woman?

But then he spoke up.

“But... If I return, it will harm Tres España.”

Juana understood that. If he returned, it would not create a new Tres España. It would instead create a Tres España that had renewed its aerial firepower but had still lost a war. With him in command, doubts would remain about their ability to command aerial battles and their firepower would be less useful as a card in diplomacy and trade.

“It is best for all of you if I am gone and everything is handed over to the rest of you.”

Juana just about replied to that line, but a thought stopped her.

...It's so painful.

The next thing she knew, tears were falling down her cheeks. They would not stop and new ones joined them.

...Can anything be as painful as this?

“Juana!?”

“What can I do!?”

She replied to his question more loudly than she had expected.

“What can I do to make you care more about us than your past!?”

Despite thinking it was a lot like a fight between children, Juana clenched her fists.

“Are you saying the rest of us aren’t capable of recovering from any possible losses if you’re around!?”

She tried to wipe away the tears and found her glasses in the way, but she could not be bothered to remove them before rubbing her eyes and letting out a small breath.

“Will you not allow us to save you!?”

“...”

“Why...?”

Why?

“Why are the people you lost still more important than me, who you saved? If you hadn’t saved me back then, would you have actually cared about me!?”

“I...”

“I have thought about the person who saved me all this time! I want to assist him in the future. I want to help ‘mister’. And...”

And...

“I want to be by your side!!”

And yet...

“Why do I need to pretend to be who I used to be to talk with you? How can you save me back then but throw me aside now? Nothing...nothing could be more painful!”

She could not bear to look him in the eye. She felt she had merely let out what had been bottled up in her heart, but she also felt bad for growing so accusative when she had meant to save him.

She did not know what to do and she simply shed tears at the pain and her own weakness.

But he suddenly looked up.

“Juana!?”

She did not manage to reply before an explosion occurred on the bow behind her.

She was thrown into the air before a single thought could enter her mind.

A moment later, Juana realized she was lying face up on the hot deck.

“Are you okay, Juana?”

She saw him covering her with his own body.

She understood what had happened: he had pulled her toward himself, protected her, and saved her.

“I’m sorry,” she said blankly.

“It’s fine.”

He smiled just as he had so long ago.

“This is all I can do.”

He said the same thing as well. That same exchange had occurred countless times after he had saved her and she now knew what it meant. This was the one thing he was capable of, so...

“...!!”

She embraced him from below, pulled him to her, and clung to him.

“Please! *This much* is fine, so please keep doing it forever!”

After all...

“*This much* was enough to save me!”

She did not let go and she lowered her head slightly to look him directly in the eye. She felt she was forcing this onto him, but if this was what it took to keep him from turning back toward the past, she would do it.

“Do you not like me? I asked the secretary about your tastes in women...and I did my best. I can’t do anything about my personality, but do you not like how I appear on the surface?”

“I...um... That stupid man... How inappropriate.”

“As repayment for saving me, you can do whatever you want with me.”

“W-wait. Let’s calm down for a mo-...”

While Segundo was struggling to find something to say, someone suddenly arrived from the side of the destroyed bridge.

It was Gin and she was looking around.

“Vice President, you need to bring the chancellor with you and leave. In another half minute or so...”

She froze in place when she saw the two of them. Segundo did as well, but Juana did not. She lifted her head and placed her lips on his.

He was clearly confused, but she did not let go. She clung to him and desired him by force.

“...”

After a few seconds, she took a breath and he frantically spoke up.

“Juana!? Oh, um, Gin. This is, well...”

“Testament. We can leave it at that.”

“That was fast! And wait, Juana! Th-this is hardly fair!!”

“Then,” said Juana while forcing as large a smile as she could manage. “Will you give us a proper answer this time instead of running off on your own?”

Segundo was left speechless and a ship appeared in the sky to the side. However, it did not appear by travelling through the sky. Its vermillion form appeared bow-first as if erasing a portion of the night sky.

“This is the San Martín, a Tres Españan stealth ship and the chancellor’s ship.”

“My ship?” asked Segundo as he stood up with Juana still clinging to him.

However, he soon shook his head.

“No, it isn’t. I gave the order to remove my inherited name and transfer it to you.”

“Testament. But when I later revealed my lie, you said ‘what was said here doesn’t count’, remember?”

“Testament. I did, but...”

He seemed to realize what that meant and Fusae used a *cadena firma* to speak from the bridge of the main fleet.

“You could ask just how much the ‘here’ of ‘what was said here’ covers.”

“That is the most convenient interpretation at the moment. More importantly, look at this.”

While still embracing him, Juana looked from the tilting deck to the eastern sky. The Musashi could be seen there, but its eight ships were taking a certain action.

“They’re turning?”

“Testament. It seems the Testament Union has... No, it seems M.H.R.R. sent a notification to the Testament Union. They claim Musashi’s presence as mercenaries goes beyond what the Testament descriptions allow and that our arrival to rescue you means that the armada battle is not yet over.”

“Then...”

She just about summed it all up by apologizing, but she shook her head.

“At the very least, my lie has come to its end. But it is my turn to save now. And you please continue saving. This will merely bring us back to the original plan we made together. Isn’t that right?”

“So we’re finally back to this footage. The way England restricted it to audio left the events there almost completely incomprehensible.”

In a dimly-lit cathedral, Innocentius watched the conflict between the Musashi and the Tres Españan fleet on a widescreen *cornice firma*.

The others had all gone home, but the names of those connected to the divine chat were displayed at the upper right of the *cornice firma*. The one belonging to a woman named Olimpia lit up.

Pope Sister: “Brother, why did the Testament Union pass on M.H.R.R.’s notification?”

Pope: “That is the normal state of things. During a peaceful time with no meetings, the Testament Union is merely a communication organization.”

Professor: “Allowing Musashi to participate as mercenaries would be a problem for M.H.R.R. which forms its military with mercenaries. Their emperor is Catholic and there is a danger of Musashi siding with the Protestant principalities that wish for independence, so this could give their enemy a lot of firepower. During the Thirty Years’ War, Hexagone Française and M.H.R.R. are enemies, so it seems Hexagone Française is firmly protesting this notification.”

Pope Sister: “You’re amazing, Professor.”

I knew all that too, thought Innocentius.

However, he checked the different nations’ reactions based on a list of notifications. He was most interested in England’s reaction, but...

“England is refusing to acknowledge the complaint about their use of Musashi as mercenaries, but I suppose they have no choice but to accept the continuation of the armada battle. If they don’t, we could claim the battle never happened and they would lose the advantage they gained by using the Musashi. M.H.R.R.’s notification really is cruelly made. To accept the use of mercenaries, the armada battle must continue. To not accept it, the battle is erased altogether. It’s all perfectly logical, but it’s so very like Hashiba.”

Professor: “Which option do we support?”

Pope: “The same as England. Since Hashiba is planning to invade K.P.A. Italia using the Far East’s history recreation, the option of hiring Musashi as mercenaries is quite interesting. Their religion is completely different which means they are not heretics, so K.P.A. Italia could hire them. And if Tres España manages to destroy the Musashi, that’s fine too.”

All that remains is seeing which side wins, thought Innocentius.

He went on to think about which one he predicted would win and finally gave a sort of conclusion.

Pope: “Tachibana Dousetsu, as the former Peerless in the West, how would you say your daughter, Tachibana Gin, is doing?”

Lightning Cutter: “Testament. She is still inexperienced and easily manipulated by strength, but I believe she is doing well enough. Muneshige’s arrival and my choice to leave seem to be leading to an excellent result.”

Pope: “Your adoptive son being badly injured is an excellent result?”

“Testament,” sent the Tachibana father.

Lightning Cutter: “Those with strength have a tendency to forget that they always have room to improve. If you recall, I displayed my skill as the Peerless in the West even after being rendered hemiplegic in an accident. Her husband is injured and she has lost both her arms, but...”

After the span of a breath, the former Peerless in the West continued.

Lightning Cutter: “Losing more while young seems to be the Tachibana style.”

Tres España’s main fleet and the Musashi’s eight ships faced each other at a distance of approximately twenty kilometers. They checked each other’s position, situation, and firepower.

Both sides had attempted to end the battle with normal fighting, but M.H.R.R.’s notification and the other nations’ harsh reactions were forcing the battle to continue.

This was due to the other nations – especially the Catholic ones – understanding what it meant for the Musashi to be used as a warship and diplomats had contacted Tres España to say their nations would support Tres España after the war if they sunk the Musashi.

The continuation of the battle had been directly caused by M.H.R.R.'s notification, but the other nations had seen it as a good opportunity to have Tres España and Musashi destroy each other.

Having accepted that decision, Tres España was holding a rushed meeting within San Martín.

The San Martín was shaped like a large galley and its bridge had a fairly low ceiling to make room for the giant low-speed cannon on top of it. However, that strengthened the bridge's defenses and Juana currently spoke with a model of the battlefield in the center of that bridge.

She pointed at Tres España's main fleet deployed south to north within Tres España's borders and the Musashi which was within England's borders to the east.

"The Musashi is partially destroyed already, so it should aim for a victory through recreating the Testament descriptions rather than a military victory. In other words, they will attempt to establish the battle with the retreating Tres Españan fleet at the final stages of the armada battle. In other words, they will attempt to force us to retreat."

"What are the conditions for establishing that retreating battle, Juana?" asked Segundo.

"Testament. It will be established if the Musashi sinks one of our ships within our borders. That will be viewed as our fleet 'fleeing back to its home and being sunk by its pursuers'."

She took a breath and indicated the models of their fleet as if stroking them.

"If possible, I would have liked to send out a sacrificial ship to have sunk and therefore receive the fewest losses, but the Testament Union is monitoring us more closely than before. The Musashi is partially destroyed, so they can say they fought a battle, but we are unharmed and thus are seen as not having fought. I

doubt just sending out a sacrificial ship would be enough for the Testament Union to accept the armada battle recreation.”

“My efforts only messed with your plans, didn’t they?” Segundo sighed. “It’s all ended up the way it was originally supposed to be, so now we have to be damaged as much as I damaged the Musashi.”

“What you did was not a bad thing, chancellor.”

Juana displayed a *cadena firma* that showed Fusae with the rest of the main fleet. Fusae shrugged, smiled, and continued where Juana had left off.

“That’s right. That damage to the Musashi means a lot. After all, it allows us to get off with less damage. While we do have to fight the Musashi again now, there’s another way of establishing the armada battle that’s quite convenient for us. Chancellor, you’ve realized what that is, haven’t you?”

Segundo sighed in response.

“Testament,” he said to everyone on the bridge. “Sinking the Musashi or having the Musashi fail to recreate the retreating battle would prove that the armada battle ‘happened’ much like how we ‘won’ the Lepanto despite losing so badly.”

After all...

“This situation came about due to the Testament Union’s instructions. If it leads to failure, we can say it was due to their interference. But they aren’t about to admit to their own failure, so they’ll create a convenient interpretation to say the armada battle was a success.”

“Testament,” agreed Juana. “We will achieve victory over the Musashi and to do that we will attack that partially destroyed ship. Our basic strategy is to use the main fleet as the ‘rear guard’ and have them fire from within Tres España’s borders. That long-range shellfire will guide the Musashi’s gravity barriers and other defenses to one side while the Santiago Caballero god of war unit attacks from above. The vice chancellor and the others will then board them from an open position and occupy one of the ships. The Musashi’s ships have lost their

surface armor, so we do not need to think about the possibility of the Musashi ramming us. They also cannot use their stealth cruising while the chancellor's chaff is still in effect."

"Testament. It would be best to settle this while that remains true. But be careful, everyone. You can never know what is going to happen in a modern battle. I was taught that anew tonight. The people of Musashi tend to do whatever they want, so they can take a while to get moving, but once they do, they are quite frightening. Make sure not to let your guard down."

As everyone on the Tres Españan side all replied "testament", the people on the Musashi side were holding a quick meeting.

The main force of the Musashi was gathered on Musashino's bridge, some through divine transmission.

On the Musashi's bridge, conflict had broken out over the food prepared as battle rations.

"Hey, when did my milk get swapped out with curry!?"

"Um, did the yakiniku meals from my merchant's office get sent there?"

"I think I saw our teacher eating them all herself."

"S-stop that, Toori-kun! Don't touch my shrine's kudzu leaf meal 'Leaf Me Alone'!"

"What? You just don't get it, Asama! This kind of local specialty is the best! And Asama! Why does your meal have sake with it!? Is it fuel for your Shinto boob beam!?"

"N-no! It's a local specialty! Just like you were saying!"

"Oh? So you like local specialties, Toori-sama? Then why not try this Blue Thunder specialty I made? It is called the Croq Bento. It is entirely made of butter

croquettes, leather croquettes, and grass croquettes for three kinds of ‘croq’. They are all the result of choosing the best option, so it should be delicious. Even the clothing.”

“Wait!? I don’t think these are croquettes. They look more like impossible-to-describe fried foods.”

At any rate, everyone agreed to pile the Blue Thunder products in front of Toori and the meeting with the transport ship arriving from England began via divine transmission.

First, “Musashi” spoke while preparing some tea.

“I have gathered the opinions of the ship captain automatons and we have enough fuel for about three more short gravitational accelerations. Even if we attempted to use those to reach IZUMO from our current coordinates, the Tres Españan fleet would catch up to us in three hours before we arrived in IZUMO. Over.”

“In that case, we have to keep fighting. Balfette-kun, can you continue as commander?”

“Hmm... Well, I guess we don’t have time to switch over, so I’ll do it.”

The look in everyone’s eyes asked if she was sure and Neshinbara’s voice did the same.

“Can you handle it? If it would be too much trouble, I can take over while communicating with “Musashino”-kun and the other automatons.”

“No, no.” Adele gave a bitter smile. “I have some ideas about this and I need to repay you anyway.”

“Repay him?” everyone asked.

Adele looked at the sign frame sending in Neshinbara’s voice.

“When England’s three officers and Shakespeare attacked, the final direct weight was meant for me, but you took it instead. It wasn’t falling into the cargo hole

that broke your leg. It was from looking after me. I'm sorry I never had a chance to say it before, but thank you."

Everyone exchanged a glance and poked at the sign frame from England with their fingers or chopsticks.

"Someone's trying to show off..."

"Heh heh heh," said Kimi through the divine transmission. "This history nerd is trying to raise flags with all the glasses girls, isn't he!? And he only just finished setting up a diary exchange with Shakespeare! His youthfulness is out of control!"

"That was more like exchanging malice. Besides, if Balfette-kun had taken a direct hit during England's attack, Shinagawa would've been in trouble. That's why I did it. But if I or anyone close to me had pointed it out, it would've sounded like an excuse, so I decided not to say anything about it."

Everyone gave quiet and bitter laughs and Neshinbara must have heard because he sighed.

"Our overall goal is to achieve victory in this naval battle by establishing the Tres Españan fleet's retreating battle, but here are some smaller goals leading up to that:

"Silence the aerial god of war unit.

"End the shellfire from the enemy's main ships.

"Intercept the enemy's landing unit.

"But the biggest one is this:

"Sink the enemy flagship, the San Martín.

"I expect the San Martín to show up if we push toward their main fleet to establish the retreating battle, so we need to crush it somehow."

“From a Weiss Techno perspective, this is a pretty offensive strategy. Do we really have to fight that stealth ship?”

“Judge. After all, it managed to damage the Musashi. If we don’t crush it here, we’ll have to prove our military superiority in future negotiations with other nations. Also, Tres España is currently a top-level Testament Union nation. If we survive a clash with their aerial forces and even sink their flagship, it will greatly strengthen our position in the future.”

“Then do you have an idea of how the battle will likely progress?” asked Adele.

“Yes,” answered Neshinbara. “Their main fleet will primarily fire on us at long range and send their god of war unit in for an attack. If we make it through the god of war attack, the San Martín is sure to show up. Before that happens, we need to sink it or at least locate it and have a definite method of dealing with it. Only then can we make our way toward their main fleet. The Musashi can’t move until we’ve dealt with the San Martín. Moving will make it harder to locate the stealth ship by sound and prevent us from avoiding any shots it fires back at us. You need to rely on the gravity barriers for defense and work to locate the San Martín. Once we locate it, we’ve won.”

Once the two approaching sides arrived within fifteen kilometers of each other, they took certain actions.

First, Tres España’s main fleet began firing and fifteen fully-equipped El Azors from the aerial god of war unit were launched into the night sky from the standby chambers on the side of the aircraft carrier.

Meanwhile, the people on the Musashi took their positions on the deck while two people stood on Musashino’s bow.

Those two were Musashi Chancellor and Student Council President Aoi Toori and Princess Horizon.

With those two positioned in front, everyone else prepared for the coming battle.

While the Musashi pointed its bow toward the enemy's main fleet to reduce the surface area that could be hit, the San Martín entered stealth cruising as if being erased into the air. The god of war unit approached through that now empty area of sky and the enemy ships' first shots shook Asakusa's bow.

The second armada battle had begun.

Study:

●The Second Armada Battle●



"Sis! Sis! Everyone's making a huge fuss over this second round, but I don't really get it. Can you explain what's going on!?"



"Heh heh heh. Fussy brother, your wise sister will explain it with a diagram. And since you probably want an outline of the ships at this point, I'll add that too."

●Battlefield Diagram●

Tres España's Main Fleet

●Musashi Diagram●



Once the Musashi locates the San Martín, it will ensure its safety and charge toward the Tres Española fleet.

Sinking an enemy ship in Tres Española territory will establish the retreating battle.



San Martín in Stealth Mode



"So for now we're just floating around, huh? But the San Martín sure is considerate! If it spelled its name a little differently, it'd sound pretty dirty!"



"The name isn't in Far Eastern, so there's nothing dirty about it."

The Second Armada Battle

Toori: Sis! Sis! Everyone's making a huge fuss over this second round, but I don't really get it. Can you explain what's going on!?"

Kimi: Heh heh heh. Fussy brother, your wise sister will explain it with a diagram. And since you probably want an outline of the ships at this point, I'll add that too.

Top right: Battlefield Diagram

Line of ships: Tres España's Main Fleet

Text: Once the Musashi locates the San Martín, it will ensure its safety and charge toward the Tres Españan fleet. Sinking an enemy ship in Tres Españan territory will establish the retreating battle.

Bottom right: San Martín in Stealth Mode

Bottom middle: The Musashi

Top left: Musashi Diagram

Ship names:

First Port Ship – Asakusa

First Starboard Ship – Shinagawa

Front Central Ship – Musashino

Second Port Ship – Murayama

Second Starboard Ship – Tama

Rear Central Ship – Okutama

Third Port Ship – Oume

Third Starboard Ship – Takao

Toori: So for now we're just floating around, huh? But the San Martín sure is considerate! If it spelled its name a little differently, it'd sound pretty dirty!"

Kimi: The name isn't in Far Eastern, so there's nothing dirty about it.

Chapter 61: Defense Units in the Sky

CHAPTER 61

"Defense Units in the Sky"



What do you do
If they don't show an opening?
Point Allocation (Defend)

What do you do

If they don't show an opening?

Point Allocation (Defend)

As the battle sent tremors through the ship, Heidi ran through the sixth basement of Okutama. She occasionally placed exhaustion recovery charms in her mouth and the circular meter indicating its remaining power would fully rotate around and vanish. She complained to herself how much physical strength she was using and she finally arrived in the cargo area that filled the 16th wide block.

Unlike the larger specialized cargo areas in the first port and starboard ships, this was a standard Musashi cargo area that used the same space as any of the wide blocks. She used a password key to pass through the wooden bulkhead door that was used in place of a guard station and she immediately relocked the door after stepping inside. The only others inside were Marube-ya staff who had the same key.

The long and narrow floor was filled with Musashi-style wooden containers that had been shoved inside from the hatch on the stern end. All of the student merchants opened the access hatches on the top of one of the containers.

“Oh, Heidi! Sorry for calling you here, but come look at this!”

They pointed inside from above.

Heidi tilted her head and wondered what it was as she climbed the ladder on the side and spoke to the others.

“Lord Howard gave us this, didn't he? Isn't it the so-called present he gave us just before the Musashi left port?”

“Judge. That's right, but what is it?”

Everyone got down on hands and knees to look inside from the narrow space above.

She tilted her head again. One only needed to peer in from above when the cargo was a liquid, a grain, coal, or some other granular object. Simply put, it was for any cargo that would spill out as soon as the side was opened. Shirojiro had already checked through everything, but he had not said anything about this and he was currently out on business.

“Well, if I don’t know, I can always ask him. So what is it?”

Everyone peered in at once, but there was no need to ask what was contained inside.

“Rocks?”

The container was filled with rocks about the size of a child’s head and the others looked troubled.

“It’s true rocks are valuable on the Musashi. Some people say they need them to make pickled foods. But still.”

“We aren’t supposed to pour them down on people in battle, are we?”

Heidi listened to all their ideas and frowned.

“That glasses man!”

...Oh, but Shiro-kun checked over it.

“Then it must be something good! It has to be, right!?”

“Did someone brainwash you, Heidi!?”

“You just don’t understand,” she complained with a snort, but she still tilted her head.

What were these rocks good for?

After a sudden vertical vibration, one of the others hit his head on the ceiling.

“That was an attack from an enemy god of war. I recognize the sound from Mikawa.”

That meant...

“The battle really has begun!”

Adele watched the attack by the enemy god of war squadron from the bridge.

...Santiago Caballero is a famous aerial god of war squadron, so seeing them in action is a great learning experience.

Tres España's god of war squadron formed units of three and attacked with five such units.

Of the three, two rotated between attacker and assister and the third acted as the controller and leader who monitored their surroundings and sent targeting information.

Two units fought at close range while two others covered for them and they set up a rotation of roles as well. The final remaining unit covered for them all and commanded them. Its covering fire primarily came in the form of sniper shots.

The continued rotation of the attacks eliminated any losses and allowed them to fight indefinitely.

...They've clearly been well-trained.

The fighters of other nations' academies would often act in teams on a daily basis, even in their normal lives. They would go as far as to eat and bathe together. Their academy classes and presentations were all together and those lovely young men would appear in academy divine TV ads saying “Alcalá de Henares! We may be broke, but just look how big our smiles are!” Adele felt that

was a bit different from how the horrible people in her class acted. They were so defenseless that Naruze would make a gay doujinshi about them in an instant.

And as they attacked, the Musashi focused on defending. It was said defense was easier than offense, but that was not necessarily the case. After all, everyone here was more or less a beginner. Just like at Mikawa, the most they could do was track the shells and gods of war with capture spells and then intercept them.

However, they were still fighting.

It was an entirely defensive fight, but they had a plan.

Neshinbara had yet to arrive, but receiving his assistance via divine transmission was a huge help. In truth, Adele was neither a commander nor a strategist. She was only in command due to the process of elimination.

...I'm convinced I've lost some weight during these past few hours. I'm not going to say from where, though!!

Actually being out on the battlefield was easier on her mind, even if it was not easier on her body.

Currently, she was watching the enemy gods of war from the bridge.

However, they were not yet perfectly handling those gods of war. The Holy Spell chaff was still clinging to the Musashi, so the automatons could not instantly exchange information through their shared memories.

Nevertheless, they were using handwritten memos and other methods to gather and transmit information.

They're really desperate, thought Adele before asking a question to “Musashino”.

“When do you think the wind will render the chaff ineffectual?”

“Judge. This is only my personal estimation, but I would say twenty minutes from now. Over.”

Their strategy until then was to wait, but there was something they could do before that: defend, endure, and persevere. Afterwards, their efforts would be repaid with a chance to attack.

...Either way, we can't move until we sink the San Martín.

Adele waited for their chance with nervous sweat appearing on her forehead. She raised her right hand to give a command and realized she might be a little too into this.

“Not much longer now.”

While the Musashi settled into defense, the Tres Españan god of war squadron wore down those defenses and confirmed the location of their forces.

“B2 leader to Base1. It's no use. The water on the bottom of the ships is flowing up too thickly. They seem to be changing the thickness in the areas we approach. A ship's cannon could probably get through, but with ours, we need to split apart the water for a direct hit or it won't get through.”

“Testament, Gran Muñeca unit. This is Base1. They most likely have lookouts, so please attack them if you spot any during combat. But do not try to follow them if they escape. Moving them from their post even temporarily is good enough.”

“A1 leader to C leader, please swap us out with A2. My left knife is about to break, but we're in a bad position. We'll remain until the last second, so have them attack from the top. ...Oh, damn! They've got a lock on me!”

“C leader here. Testament. A2, you're up. A1 leader got unlucky. Use the designated course to attack the first starboard ship from the designated position.”

“A2 leader here. Testament. What, I don't get to watch him panic as they trail after him?”

“You got promoted just before we were sent out, so I’m not gonna let you just sit around.”

“It’s better than being promoted afterwards.”

“That’s true.”

They all laughed and continued exchanging divine transmissions as they fought.

“It’s about time we had a serious discussion. ...How’s their air defense? Has anyone been stupid enough to check?”

“Testament. It’s thick but its range isn’t that big. It seems to be about five hundred meters on average. It makes sense when you remember they’re using what were originally developed as anti personnel spells. We should be fine as long as they don’t hit us in the joints or gaps in the armor. But be careful about the face. You don’t want your sensory devices reflexively shutting down.”

“Shut that off, you amateur. Are you still complaining about the wind hurting?”

“C’mon, I’ve got sensitive skin. ...Anyway, where’s their Technohexen unit? I didn’t like the looks of their attack on the mechanical phoenix unit.”

“Those phoenixes came in too straight because they’re used to the beasts of the New World that aren’t on the lookout for an attack. Don’t forget that we can move in three dimensions. They haven’t been trained well enough to follow us if we do that.”

“Testament,” they all agreed and they all knew each other well enough to recognize each other by the voice alone.

But sometimes, their smiles would vanish in an instant when someone gave a report and that happened now.

“C leader to units A, B, and C. I’ve calculated the area Musashi’s defense unit covers and I’m sending it to all of you. The way they’re using the passageways and hiding behind buildings suggests locals of each area are in charge of

defending it. It would be best to destroy as much cover as possible before Captain Takakane's landing team arrives."

"Wait, wait. If we try to fire horizontally, our own fleet will hit us from behind."

"Why didn't you turn down that promotion?"

"I don't want to hear that from someone who's working to pay off his mortgage. ...Unit B1, let's go. We'll approach the second starboard ship via 8-2, lower to 150, and attack the surface. Scatter at 11. Let's see if we can make our way out along the roads."

"Testament," replied C1 as the god of war squadron worked together. "Let's destroy the surface. Don't leave any walls behind. Create a pile of rubble and tear a hole in the ship."

Adele watched as the god of war squadron lowered its altitude and attacked Tama.

Tama was primarily used for diplomacy and trade and its surface area was mostly residential, but the front of the ship was being flattened by Tres España's blasting spells.

...It's like they're saying this is where they'll land.

Currently, containers of armor for repairs were being sent to most areas to combat the destruction. The passageways leading underground were sealed off and "Tama" had locked down the barrier doors along the corridors.

It would not be an easy place to enter from and there were plenty of obstacles before reaching anywhere important.

However...

"The defenses leading to the bridge in the rear are weakest on the second ship. The bridge is built low so diplomatic ships can moor themselves."

...So this is the most dangerous place for them to target.

The sounds of gods of war firing and flying through the air seemed to support that thought.

“The enemy god of war squadron is switching between low-altitude bombing runs and quick withdrawals! Over.”

The looping attack of descent followed by ascent continued one, two, three, and then a fourth time.

However, the gravity barriers and defensive formations were holding. There were danger reports, but Adele was patient.

And on the seventh attack, something arrived at the same time as the two attacking units, so she swung her right hand forward.

“3rd special duty officer! Please handle this!!”

“Judge!!”

Several figures flew out from Musashi’s inner hull.

They were black Technohexen.

They flew out before the transport route’s side hatch could fully open and they stood on the outside of the hull as if flipping themselves around. They already had acceleration spells prepared on their brooms or other weapons.

“Herrlich!”

But when they fired, it was not at the enemy.

They were all firing directly ahead and at the same altitude.

They simultaneously fired along the path of the gods of war attacking the surface from low-altitude.

None of them were trained well enough to target the enemy by sight, so they had decided on an altitude and all fired ahead to draw a straight line.

There were twenty-one of them and they each fired a roll of coins worth one thousand yen. The horizontal barrage created by those people and that currency flew toward the six enemies.

“...!?”

Two took direct hits and one's right arm was hit.

They had been hit.

Of the two that took direct hits, one had the scatter shot of coins bite into its wing expansion mechanism which caused the god of war to tumble in the air.

It reflexively moved the opposite wing which accelerated the tumble.

As it spun away through the air, its right leg was bent the wrong way when it struck the deck and the entire machine fell off the inner side of the ship.

The other one that received a direct hit received no actual damage because the coins hit its armor, but the other one that was hit on the right arm lost control of the rifle that arm held.

“...!”

A shot hit the first god of war in the back of the left thigh, but it still maintained its posture. With no concern for appearances, it immediately evacuated upwards.

However, the one that had fired the shot stopped moving for an instant and that was a mistake.

The anti-air fire of the defense unit focused its fire on that on which had ended its three-dimensional motion and come to a stop.

The god of war was bending back at low-altitude, so the gaps in its armor were opened wide when viewed from below. A metal spear was accelerated into its stomach and it convulsed before colliding with a building.

“!!”

After its armor broke and strength left its body, the god of war fell into empty air off the outer edge of the ship.

That was two defeated.

But someone took action after the repeated losses to the god of war unit: C Leader who acted as the unit's leader.

He rapidly ascended to a safe area out of range of the Technohexen.

He looked down to check on the Musashi from overhead and get a grasp on the enemy's location.

However, the enemy was moving toward him.

This enemy rapidly ascended after moving from below the ship and up the outer hull.

“The Schwarz Hexen from Mikawa!?”

Naito fired.

She was already equipped with Schwarz Fräulein and she held up the broom with multiple layers of acceleration spells.

“Neshinbara Tou-chan can be pretty nasty in how well he reads things.”

As she spoke half in admiration and half in exasperation, she took an instantaneous action.

Just like in Mikawa, she fired up into the sky. C Leader tried to escape, but he was too slow to raise the wings on his back.

...I can't accurately guide the shot without Ga-chan, though.

His reaction had been slowed because he had only just escaped and come to a stop. Because the other Technohexen had fired from the Musashi, he had subconsciously assumed he would be safe up in the sky.

But Naito took advantage of that.

She held up her broom and used the several layers of acceleration spells.

“Herrlich!”

The supervisor of the Tres Españan god of war squadron was pierced through the left side and out the back.

A cheer rose from the Musashi and they covered for the descending Technohexen.

The god of war squadron scattered again and the sky cleared up for a short time.

In that moment, a ship-wide announcement from “Asakusa” cut off everyone’s cheers.

“To the northwest off the port side at ten o’clock!”

“Asakusa’s” voice shouted a direction.

“Low-speed shell detected! Tres España’s stealth ship has fired! Over!!”

Tres España's stealth ship named the San Martín had supplied the damage that had kept the Musashi stuck in England and it fired on them again now.

“Preparing defenses! Over!”

“Musashi” handled the gravity barriers from the waiting room next to the bridge.

She coordinated the defensive walls with “Asakusa” on Asakusa without using their shared memory.

A single shell flew their way. It was a physical shell and it had no divine protection or spells applied, so a dozen or so gravity barriers would be enough to divert it.

They could not communicate their thoughts via shared memory, but they could statistically predict where the other would move first based on their past movement patterns. “Musashi” virtually synchronized her actions with “Asakusa” despite not being able to see her.

“We will divert this shell! Over.”

The shell ultimately struck the torii-shaped gravity barriers, lost speed as it broke through a few of them, and finally burst.

“...!!”

Cheers rose from the left side of the ship. “Musashi” could no longer see the shell from where she was, but...

...It must have been diverted!

There was no second shell. Given the time from “Asakusa's” shout to the interception, the enemy seemed to be staying more than three kilometers away in fear of Horizon's Logismo Oplo.

Defending against a shot from the stealth ship that had damaged them before was sure to raise morale and the guns on the Musashi's port and starboard sides returned fire toward the position the San Martín had fired from.

However...

“The shells are passing through!”

Their shells did not hit the enemy.

“The San Martín has left the corresponding area!! Over!!”

“Musashi” thought. She made an estimation based on the hit they had previously taken near England.

...I have determined the San Martín can move at the speed of a high-speed ship.

They could not hit it in time by firing back after it fired on them.

That had just been proven.

...This has gotten much more difficult.

Adele on the bridge and Neshinbara listening in over the staticky divine transmission had to be thinking the same thing. They still had not located the enemy stealth ship and would continue to be targeted by it.

The enemy was certainly moving around so its location would not be known. It would likely fire if the Musashi tried to move or showed an opening.

With that in mind, it was clear why Tres España had only sent out their god of war squadron. Bringing in the many other ships would prevent the stealth ship from moving around.

If Musashi did not locate the stealth ship, they could eventually be hit. Even if they could detect and defend against the shells, it would not necessarily work so well the next time. After all, the god of wars were searching for more weakly defended areas and acting as a diversion.

“Musashi” then heard someone take a breath from the sofa behind her.

She turned around to find Suzu whose face was a bit pale.

“Judge. Do not worry, Suzu-sama. The defense is complete.”

“Wh-what was...that?”

“Judge. A low-speed shell from the enemy stealth ship. One of those hit us before, but we defended with multiple gravity barriers this time. I have determined ‘Asakusa’ was able to respond so quickly because she has the most data on the previous hit. Over.”

“I see,” muttered Suzu before taking a breath. “So that...first sound was...the shell being...fired.”

“Musashi” replied with “judge” to help put Suzu at ease, but she suddenly felt something in Suzu’s words did not fit.

...But what?

She had determined it was odd for Suzu to say that, but she could not determine why that was without searching through the massive database or consulting the others via their shared memory.

For that reason, she analyzed the statement with only her own artificial brain and spoke to Suzu.

“If something is bothering you, please tell me because we are working to locate the stealth ship. Over.”

Fusae quietly clicked her tongue in Tres España’s main fleet.

“Their distributed spells and ether supply allows the Technohexen and defense units to do whatever they want when we get too close. And even the San Martín will have difficulty hitting with their gravity barriers. How are things with you, Taka?”

A *cadena firma* appeared and produced his voice.

“Didn’t I tell you not to call me when we’re in stealth because we don’t want to make any weird noises?”

“But I want a report from you.”

“They defended against San Martín’s shell. What else am I supposed to say?”

“I suppose you’re right,” replied Fusae while she sent him text information on the Musashi’s reaction.

She thought about the condition on the distant ship’s deck.

...Their joy over defending will have gradually faded and they’ll be growing impatient.

The Musashi was stopped and the defensive formations on the deck were being repositioned or newly sent out. They were located at the center of the ships, along the outer edges, and on the major roads and they were all in the same stances as when they had responded to the low-speed shell.

“And in response to our gods of war... Oh, there they go. Their work gods of war are out holding giant shields. They’re in groups of two and one of those two has picked up the bow at their feet and started to use it.”

“If those bows and shields fit in a god of war’s armored outfits and hands, they must be the ones England’s ArchsArt makes for giants. But just like a ballista, those arrows can’t hit a god of war even with homing spells.”

“Um, Taka? From what I’ve seen, I think they’ve been ordered not to pursue anything moving left and right or up and down. They’re only firing at stopped targets or ones coming straight at them.”

“So they’re only swinging at stopped balls or strikes, hm?”

“Testament. I’d do the same if I was them. Narrowing it down to there lets the homing actually work and raises the odds of the arrows hitting. Also, the attack

spells used by their normal students have a range of only about 500, but a god of war's arrow can reach 1500. That's probably the main point behind it."

"In that case..."

"Testament. The god of war units can't descend. The coordinated firing of the Technohexen unit and the sharpshooting of that Schwarz Hexen was enough to keep them from getting too close, but the long range of their gods of war means ours need to back off a little. And since C Leader was injured too, the injured will return to the aircraft carrier. The uninjured will form units of three and perform hit-and-run attacks to gather information for the landing unit's entry. It's actually decent timing." Fusae fixed her track suit's collar. "It looks like they understand what the San Martín's presence means. I'm sure they'll figure this out eventually, but let's surprise them some more until that happens."

Adele exchanged opinions with the automatons on the bridge.

They had calculated the coordinates from which the San Martín had fired earlier. They had then compared that to the flight patterns of the god of war squadron and the locations the other enemy ships had fired on.

"Adele-sama, it seems Tres España is leaving a certain amount of space open as they attack so as not to interfere with or accidentally hit the San Martín. The San Martín is currently to the rear port side of the Musashi."

An object representing the enemy ship appeared on the model Musashi floating in the air. It was on the rear port side. As a clock position, it was at seven o'clock.

"We can estimate that the San Martín is moving here. We can use the guns set on the back of the second port ship and the outer hull of third port ship. Those guns have an effective range of seven kilometers, so it is well within range. Over."

"Judge."

Adele nodded and ordered the six guns on the port side to target the corresponding airspace.

They had not confirmed the San Martín's location, so they could only predict it based on the space left open.

...But there are plenty of other areas that are being left open.

The key to estimating the San Martín's location was how quickly it could move with the spatial barrier of primary stealth active.

Calculating the enemy's location while under the pressure of being targeted while motionless was exhausting to everyone involved. Even now, a divine transmission was coming in from the completely panicked idiot on the bow.

“Adele! Adele! Is it all over!? Are we all gonna die!? Nwoooohh! There's one sexual and businesslike thing I want to do before I die! Horizon, you know what I mean, don't you!?”

“Judge. Do you wish to receive a urine test? Make sure to include as much blood and proteins as you like.”

“Huhhh!? I thought this was a game of catch, but you just hit the ball back at the pitcher, didn't you!? Wait, Horizon! Horizon! Why are you pulling a giant paper cup out of your storage space!? Don't draw a line on the inside! I can't fill it up that much! Or do you want to see me get serious!? Is that it!?”

...I can't do this. It's going to drive me insane. I need to stop listening.

At any rate, the automatons' observations said the enemy ship was a high-speed ship meant for quick decisive battles. Based on its speed and the movements of the gods of war, it was determined to be on the rear port side.

This assumption made for a dreadful opponent, but they could put up a fight if they could estimate its location.

And so Adele ordered for the cannons to fire and Neshinbara gave some advice.

“Let’s find them. Fire all across that area of sky. If we hit them, we win.”

“Secretary, couldn’t they circle around behind us?”

“The smoke coming from the Musashi is still behind you, right? Primary stealth eliminates their visual form and sounds, but it doesn’t eliminate their existence. Even if they’re using a visual compensation spell, they’ll avoid moving through smoke because it’s so easily disturbed. If they do try to pass through, they’ll go under you, so angle your line of fire there.”

They did not have to hit. As long as they showed the enemy they knew where they were, they would be on equal footing.

And so Adele passed on the firing location and...

“Fire!”

But no cannon fire came from the Musashi.

Suzu and “Shinagawa” were the first to notice. “Shinagawa” had a lot of similarities to “Asakusa” as they were both captains of the first ships and she had been looking back in sky on the starboard side in case gravity barrier defense was needed.

“Low-speed shell detected!! It is arriving from the rear starboard side!! Over!”

They had thought the San Martín was on the port side, but it was actually on the starboard side.

“Did it move above or below the Musashi to reach the other side!?”

“Musashi” had only been able to respond to the attack from an unexpected location that did not match the automatons’ prediction because Suzu had turned in that direction. That acted as an accurate guideline and she deployed the gravity barriers as soon as the shell was visually detected.

After a short delay, “Tama” deployed her own barriers, but it was too late.

They diverted the shell, but not by enough. It struck the bottom of the arrival and departure deck for transport ships and diplomatic ships on Tama’s outer hull.

With a great sound, the materials were smashed to pieces and the deck broke from its connections with the ship. Tama also shook as if being rocked by waves.

As Tama shook up and down by about three meters, the defensive formations on its deck stopped moving. Anyone working on the outer surface of the Musashi was given a divine protection that kept them on the ground, but those who had not had both feet on the ground lost their balance.

Some were thrown to the ground and others fell.

Voices of surprise, repeated explosions, and the sound of the wind could all be heard.

“Ah.”

As soon as Suzu made that noise, “Musashi” saw it.

Several small ships had appeared in the sky off the starboard side where the enemy gods of war had been firing on them.

This fleet had been towed along within the San Martín’s stealth barrier.

It was the landing unit led by Hironaka Takakane and primarily made up of Tres España’s baseball and track teams.

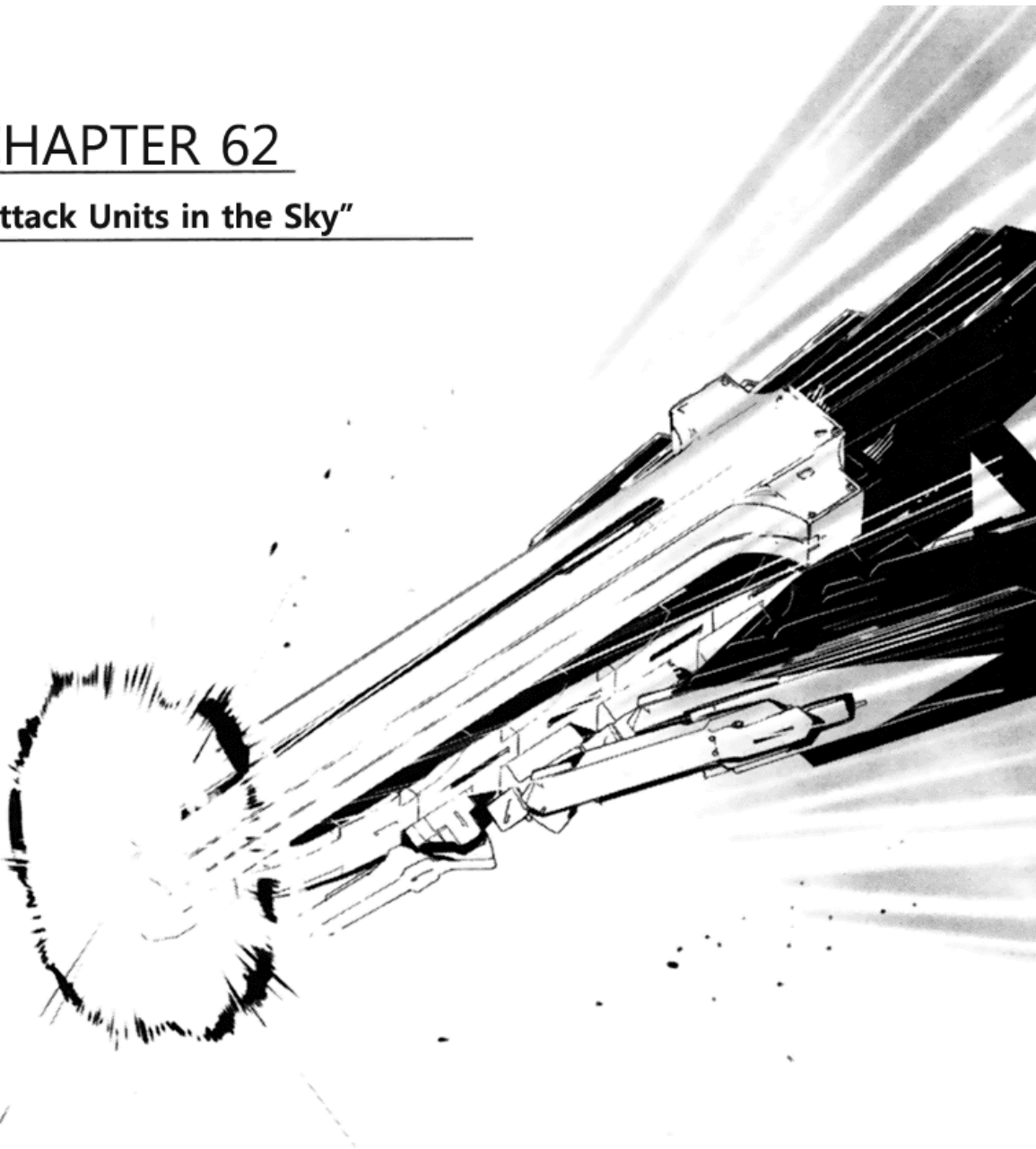
The landing unit quickly approached Tama while letting the god of war squadron handle the defensive formations that were attempting to recover.

“The enemy is approaching...no, they are landing! Over!”

Chapter 62: Attack Units in the Sky

CHAPTER 62

"Attack Units in the Sky"



What do you do
If they show an opening?
Point Allocation (Attack)

What do you do

If they show an opening?

Point Allocation (Attack)

A small ship belonging to Tres España's track team was the first collide with Tama's deck.

The track team used the impact to perform the long jump from their ship's deck and they reconfirmed the location of the enemy's defensive formations from their elevated position. An enemy unit tried to rush toward them, but they threw javelins to scatter them.

Other ships followed, but the covering fire for the track team came from the sky off the starboard side.

"Okay, brother, start with the ones closest to ours! No targeting only the guys because you hate them!"

"Sister, it is not that I hate guys. But if you compare the two, I will choose the girls every time. If you understand now, then let's get started."

The Valdés siblings threw high-speed metal balls from their small ship, but they were not alone. Those without enough strength formed lines at set intervals on the deck and started from the back.

"Relay!!"

They used an acceleration spell to throw a metal ball to the person in front of them who would do the same as the ball flew through the air.

"Acceleration relay!! The enemy's over by third!"

The acceleration from the relay of acceleration spells and the altered line of fire between the different lines ultimately threw the accelerated metal balls along

paths with forty-five degree differences in angle. The speed was greater than the previous attack and the firing angle had been increased.

As a result, the defenders also had to deal with enemy fire at an angle, so they were forced to fortify themselves in a half circle.

“Tama” and “Musashi” sent out gravity barriers to support them, but with the possibility of the San Martín firing, all they could do was defend against the repeated close range shots.

Finally, a single figure appeared on the battlefield. Behind the catchers forming Tres España’s front line on the front starboard side of Tama, Tres Españan Vice Chancellor Hironaka Takakane descended with a long bat on his back.

He gave a sidelong glance at the enemy formation and spoke.

“Looks like I’ve got no choice. I’ll knock them all out of the way, so you all follow me!”

“Testament!” replied the others behind him.

He moved forward as shells and arrows flew toward him.

“...!”

He held his long bat in a bunting pose and deflected them all downwards as he ran.

His destination was the rear of Tama where the bridge was located at the base of the arrival and departure deck.

He had to travel approximately one kilometer and it was an almost entirely straight journey using the outer edge and the corridors alongside it.

He pointed toward the bridge that was built small and low to not interfere with arrivals and departures and he shouted.

“If we take that, this ship will stop. And if we do that...”

His legs had no feet, but he started running even faster.

“If we do that, the Musashi won’t be able to move and it’s all over!”

A moment later, a flying shell once more shook the air.

The San Martín had fired a third shot from the starboard side.

“Musashi” was busy dealing with the Valdés siblings’ attack, so she could not help much with the third shot targeting the rear of Tama. Instead, “Tama” and “Takao” responded with their gravity barriers.

“We will deflect it! Over.”

With a great roar, they defended against the attack, but another automaton shouted back.

“The guns on Tama’s starboard side cannot return fire due to the concentrated fire of the enemy god of war squadron! Over!”

That announcement brought sweat to Adele’s brow.

...They know we can return fire, so they’ve worked out a countermeasure.

Next to her, “Musashino” frowned which was unusual for an automaton.

“The San Martín moved from the rear starboard side to directly on the starboard side in order to support the landing team.”

“Judge,” replied Adele while listening to the enemy god of war squadron attack and scatter. The gods of war leaving likely meant the San Martín was also leaving. “ ‘Musashino’-san, is the San Martín’s speed the same as we predicted?”

“Judge. It is a high-speed ship. The standards would mean it can rival the Musashi’s inertial cruising after gravitational cruising. I would predict the San Martín is currently falling back behind Takao, but...”

“Musashino” tilted her head a bit.

“Judge. I can determine I am likely mistaken as my prediction for the second firing location was incorrect, but the best possible estimate based on my individual decisions is that it is farther back than Takao on the starboard side. But is it really?”

“Is it really? What do you mean?”

“Judge. Adele-sama, I detected *the same thing* from the situation surrounding the first and second attacks. However, I detected *something different about the situation* in between the second and this third attack.”

“Musashino” looked to the rear starboard side.

“My judgment is that the San Martín is located there and thus we should attack there. However, I also suspect that something is wrong because there is an uncertain element in the decision,” she said. “Adele-sama, something simply felt ‘out of place’. Do you understand what I mean? Over.”

Tres España’s god of war squadron saw the Musashi’s starboard guns turn aft.

They had clearly predicted the San Martín was located there.

The gods of war could not allow them to fire and so they attacked the guns from the air, but the Musashi used their gods of war and other defense units to defend those guns.

Tres España’s god of war squadron performed their attack, but they confirmed that the starboard guns were completing their preparations to fire.

As they exchanged attacks, they saw the starboard guns finish aiming.

An instant later, one of the gods of war sent out a divine transmission. It was C2 who was acting in C Leader’s place and he spoke a single word.

“Fire.”

Just as Adele prepared to give the starboard guns the order to fire, “Asakusa” suddenly reacted to something arriving.

“Low-speed shell detected!”

As for the direction...

“*Directly to the port* of Asakusa! The San Martín has circled around to the port side!! Over.”

“The port side!? Over.”

The automatons quickly turned from starboard to port.

They had predicted the enemy would be to the rear starboard side, but they could indeed see the white line of a flying shell directly to port.

“Asakusa” desperately pursued the shell with gravity barriers. The shell struck them with a clear sound and was diverted enough that it collided with Asakusa’s 3rd derrick which was already broken.

With the sound of destruction, smoke filled with pieces of construction materials rose from the base of the third derrick.

They had somehow survived, but a dumbfounded atmosphere filled the bridge.

“Why?”

Adele knew what the automatons meant.

...Their prediction was wrong.

It had happened before and it had happened again now. The San Martín was not in the gap they had determined it would be in.

Adele asked “Musashino” a question.

“Does moving to the port side match the San Martín’s speed?”

“Judge. A high-speed ship could make that move if it used its full speed and mobility. Over.”

“In that case,” said Adele. “Can’t we assume the San Martín used our prediction against us by circling full speed to the other side?”

“Judge. But even with primary stealth, maintaining their full speed with no after-effects should be-... No, it is not our place to say anything after having our predictions overturned. Over.”

Adele shook her head after hearing “Musashino” speak.

She had her own doubts.

“ ‘Musashino’-san, did you sense something ‘out of place’ in this fourth attack like you mentioned before? And situation-wise, how do you view the relationship between the third and fourth attacks?”

She nodded and looked directly at “Musashino”.

“We might take some damage in the process, but let’s break through the San Martín’s stealth cruising. I think what felt ‘out of place’ for you is the same thing I just realized.”

She took a breath.

“Let’s go achieve victory.”

The Musashi fired.

As Takakane and the others ran toward the stern of Tama, they saw the guns on the outer edges of the Musashi fire directly to both the port and starboard. They

were firing on the empty sky to either side, but they gradually changed angle to fire a barrage across both sides a lot like closing outstretched wings. It was a sweeping stream of shells.

“They’re trying to keep the San Martín from circling behind them and using the barrage to guide it forward. Doing the same on the starboard side must be a way to keep it from circling to that side.”

And they had a reason for guiding the San Martín to the front.

“That’s where their princess waits with her Logismo Oplo. Although its range is only three kilometers, so the Musashi will have to move forward.”

A *cadena firma* made of crosses appeared next to Takakane’s face and produced Velázquez’s voice.

“Wouldn’t it be bad if the Musashi moved forward? What if that qualifies as them pursuing us?”

“Do you know the exact qualifications for that pursuit, Velá?”

“If I did, I wouldn’t be asking. You know I’m not fond of meetings and the like.”

“Testament,” replied Takakane.

An enemy interception unit arrived from ahead and to the left. It was Musashi’s ground warriors.

At the same time, bullets flew from behind. He turned toward the fellow baseball players who had fired and they removed their hats and bowed.

“We will handle this!!”

“Don’t you run away!!”

He smiled and nodded to them before running past the enemy warriors while his teammates gave covering fire.

He moved from cover to cover while staying low and a few of his classmates slipped away to secure his escape or deal with the enemy. He waved at them and spoke to Velázquez through the *cadena firma*.

“The pursuit is a simple thing. An enemy ship has to attack or sink one of our ships after we pass the line of pursuit. Normally, that would be the provisional border between England and Tres España that’s located between here and Fusae’s fleet. Basically, the Musashi has to cross over there and capture or sink a ship or they have to otherwise establish a pursuit. It’d be easier if I could draw a diagram,” he said. “But Fusae and the others are already prepared to make sure they can’t establish that pursuit. Just watch.”

He turned around and saw that almost the entire main fleet had its bows pointed to the left and right. That turned all of the side guns toward the Musashi.

“The fleet can’t fire while we’re here, but that formation allows them to evade when the Musashi actually arrives. The Musashi will probably use their gravitational cruising when they do, but Fusae’s fleet will scatter to the left and right so it charges in too far on its own and is offside. Then we can claim they’re taking advantage of the history recreation to invade Tres España’s provisional borders. Also...”

Also...

“Even if the Musashi attempts to turn around, it’s just too big and it will be moving too fast. It will have to take a very wide turn which gives Fusae’s fleet enough time to regroup and time for the San Martín to attack from behind. Of course, if we take over Tama’s bridge before then, we’ll win before it even gets there.”

As he spoke, the Musashi shook. It was transferring from its quasi-mobile state to its mobile state. White spray scattered into the sky and the shaking in the deck grew gentler.

“So the Musashi is going to move. That means it’s about time for the real fight to begin.”

A certain sound responded to those words: a male voice from directly ahead.

“Yes. It is about time. Time to spend some money.”

A man sat with his legs crossed in a chair at the center of the path.

Takakane came to a quick stop and spread his arms to stop those behind him. He then gave a single laugh and faced forward.

“You’re a perfect opponent for me, Musashi Treasurer Shirojiro Bertoni.”

“Judge,” agreed Shirojiro in his casual clothes and while sitting on an expandable sofa that attached to the hard point parts on his waist. “But let me be clear about something. Our store’s bats will hit the ball much farther. Why not try them out sometime?”

Shirojiro stood up.

The angle of the sofa changed and became a side tail binder. Anti-gravity light came from the bottom of it as it supported his body. That side tail could be used for acceleration and to hold its user in place, but it could also be used as a storage space for peddling.

As the tail transformed, Takakane chose not to split up his assault team.

“You aren’t making this a duel?”

“No. I cannot have your men heading to the bridge while I fight you. If I have a chance, I will target your men as well. I showed off my power at Mikawa, did I not?”

“Testament. It was a neat trick using over a hundred people’s strength like that. I’m sure you can use it here too, but...”

Takakane rested his bat on his shoulder and looked directly at Shirojiro.

“That’s the perfect opponent for someone who can defend against any attack.”

“Most likely,” agreed Shirojiro before pointing at the sky and listening to the shellfire from both port and starboard.

He was pointing at that barrage meant to drive the San Martín to the front.

“We cannot see your stealth ship, but by pursuing it with this barrage, our Lacking Headquarters can sink it. You will lose a lot.”

“Hah. Don’t be so sure. You may be up at bat, but things aren’t going to go well for you if you miss. Also...”

He held the long bat in front with both hands. He carried his Testamenta Arma on his back, but he could not use it while they were still within England’s provisional territory. That was why he focused on defense with his bat.

...So he is making this a pure competition of skill.

As Shirojiro thought, Takakane pulled his helmet over his eyes and glanced toward the barrage of shellfire pursuing the San Martín on either side of the Musashi.

“It doesn’t matter to us if you find the San Martín or not. We’re here to capture this ship, so how about you play along for a bit, merchant?”

After that comment, Shirojiro heard a shell being fired in the sky.

...Is that a low-speed shell from the San Martín!?

He looked to the front of the Musashi where the shellfire from either side was closing in like wings, but there was nothing in the sky there. He did not see the path of the San Martín’s shell or hear the noise it would cause.

That meant the San Martín had not been driven to the front.

“What!?”

He did hear the sound of a flying shell, but it was not coming from the front.

That meant the low-speed shot had not been fired from the front or the forward port side.

“The rear starboard side!?”

“It is targeting Takao from the rear starboard side!! Over.”

The Musashi’s bridge was in an uproar and the automatons exchanged glances.

“Our prediction was wrong again!? Over.”

However, the trajectory of the flying shell was clear.

That left a single fact: at some point, the San Martín had moved from the front port side, slipped through the Musashi’s shellfire, and circled around behind them.

They all frowned and wondered what was going on, but one person took action.

That person was Adele. She raised her right hand to silence the others. The Musashi had stopped firing, and the starboard guns had been ordered to rapidly turn toward the back, but Adele gave a different order first.

“Please defend Takao!”

The coming low-speed shell had been fired from close range. “Takao” was opening gravity barriers, but she did not stop it in time.

The shell hit at an angle, broke through the barriers, and struck the base of Takao’s second derrick diagonally from above.

Its speed had been dropped, but the impact shook the ship and blasted construction materials into the air.

The starboard guns had yet to fully turn toward the rear starboard side, but Adele clenched her right fist.

“Let’s make this damage to Takao the last!!”

She took a breath and swung down her arm as she shouted out.

“Both of you, fire!!”

An instant later, the Musashi fired twice.

First, it used the port guns that had supposedly failed to pursue the San Martín and fired into the empty air.

Second, someone fired from an elevated area in the nature district on the stern of Takao.

“Put all of my internal Blessings into a barrier purification!!”

“Clap!”

One of Asama’s large arrows flew through the air directly toward the San Martín.

The Musashi students then saw two things in the sky.

One was a large vermilion ship revealed when Asama’s arrow burst into white light in the rear starboard sky.

The other was on the front port side almost directly in front of Asakusa.

“Hit confirmed!!”

Fragments of armor and the scattering spray of the stealth barrier filled the air. As the wind blew them out of the way, a vermilion ship identical to the one in the rear starboard sky appeared.

The San Martín was simultaneously located in the rear starboard sky and the front port sky.

When everyone saw that, they let out a cry.

“There were two of them!?”

As various cries of admiration filled the bridge, Adele smiled and nodded.

She reached both hands toward “Musashino” for a high five and the automaton tilted her head. But after a pause, she appeared to reach an understanding and accurately placed her own breasts in Adele’s hands.

“Will this help you as a comparison? Over.”

...Nwohhh! That statement has a response difficulty rating of “normal”!

However, she also felt she had succeeded. Currently, a close-range battle had broken out on both sides of the Musashi, but with the enemy location revealed, everyone’s anxiety had been relieved, their morale had risen, and they were working together perfectly as they defended or attacked. She could hear their voices over divine transmission.

“D-dammit! How could they trick us like this! I-I wasn’t scared or anything! Not at all!!”

“Chancellor! Keep the Blessings coming!!”

“It’s your fault that I couldn’t take my bathroom break and now I’m reaching the red zone there!!”

We need to do something about how everyone is a little too honest, thought Adele. And will that third person last with all the shaking from the shellfire?

Meanwhile, “Musashino” bowed.

“Adele-sama, you have eliminated our doubts about our predictive capabilities. Thank you very much. Please use us in the future when you need something calculated. ...But how did you manage to predict their locations? Over.”

“You were the one that said it, ‘Musashino’. You said there was something odd about the relationship between the enemy’s first and second attacks and their second and third attacks. But with the fourth attack...”

“Musashino” spoke up as if to supplement Adele’s words.

“The relationship between the third and fourth attacks was the same as that between the first and second. But how did that help? Over.”

The other automatons must have had the same question because they turned toward Adele and nodded, so Adele replied while receiving reports and giving new orders.

“Between the first and second attacks and the third and fourth attacks, we tried to return fire where the San Martín had initially fired from and were attacked from the opposite location. However, the relationship between the second and third attacks was different. The attack came from where we predicted.”

“Judge. That was why I was unable to raise the accuracy of my decisions. Over.”

“That’s right,” said Adele while raising a hand and indicating the two ships. “But if you ignored that one different relationship and only focused on the relationship between the first and second attacks and between the third and fourth attacks, it was obvious what the San Martín was doing. When their initial shell would give away their position, they would fire a second shell from the opposite side to trick us. That was all.” She took a breath. “They would place a fellow ship in the precise location they would supposedly be moving to and, if one of them was about to be attacked, the opposite ship would attack to stop the attack against their ally. It was likely the god of war squadron that told them when the Musashi was going to attack. That squadron was partially here to attack us, but they were also assisting the San Martín.”

So...

“So if we continued firing instead of stopping, we could hit one of the ships. And having Asama-san helped with revealing the other one. There aren’t many people who can fire a large-scale purification for a dispel. Asama-san, are you listening? Thanks.”

Asama: “I didn’t do all that much.”

Me: “That’s right! If Asama got serious, it would’ve gone well beyond that!”

Wise Sister: “Heh heh heh. Very true, foolish brother. That was just the beginning! Prepare yourselves, prey!!”

Asama: “Ah, these siblings really piss me off! Oh, and Toori-kun? Please send me the Blessings for my next job.”

You sound like you’re enjoying it to me, thought Adele while watching the enemy’s movements.

Currently, the San Martín to the front port side was taking quite a bit of damage.

To give it high-speed and stealth abilities, the low-speed cannon on the front was its primary weapon and it had little other armaments.

In order to escape, it fired its secondary weapons and low-speed cannon while circling around to the rear port side.

However, Adele sensed something off about that action.

“Huh?” she muttered. “Don’t tell me...”

“Musashi” suddenly heard Suzu speak.

“The same thing...as the first time...is coming!”

“The first time?”

“Musashi” questioned Suzu’s words as she opened gravity barriers toward the San Martín moving along the port side out the window.

“Suzu-sama, what do you mean by the ‘first time’? Over.”

The San Martín that had fired on them for the “first time” in this battle was most likely the one to port that they were already engaging in combat.

However, nothing about its actions as it retreated into the port sky suggested any kind of attack was coming from it.

But Suzu tilted her head at the question as if to ask why.

“The first time...is the first time.”

“Musashi” did not understand, so she thought for a quick moment.

She recalled that Suzu had had a similar comment about their opponent earlier.

It had been when the San Martín had fired on them the first time.

...She said, “So that...first sound was...the shell being...fired.”

What had that meant?

...The “first sound” would be...?

At that point, “Musashi” made a certain prediction and realized she had made a certain misunderstanding.

“Suzu-sama, when the first shell was fired earlier, you mentioned a ‘first sound’. I have two questions about that.”

She asked while convinced that the answer could reveal a danger which would overturn everything.

“When exactly was that ‘first sound’ you mentioned? Also, when was the ‘first time’ you mentioned just now? Over.”

“Eh?”

Suzu tilted her head as if confused why the automaton did not understand.

“I mean...the first time...a while back,” she said. “Th-the attack that first damaged the Musashi. When Tres España attacked...before we reached England.”

Suzu gave a clear answer.

“I heard the same thing...as that *first time*.”

In that moment, Adele realized something.

Why had the two San Martíns shown themselves and drawn their fire outwards?

Why had the main enemy fleet stopped firing and why had the gods of war dispersed?

And the last out-of-place fact that had come to her...

...Why hasn't the enemy ever targeted Musashino's bridge!?

That was not because the main fleet had feared damaging the landing team or because their hands had been too full to target it.

“There is a third ship directly ahead!! This is their true attack they've kept in reserve!!”

As if in response, something appeared in the sky directly in front of them.

It was a third San Martín.

“...!?”

Before the third vermilion ship making everyone gulp could fully appear, Adele shouted out.

“All defenses to the front!!”

But the sound of the shell being fired came first. “Musashino” did open gravity barriers, but...

...It's too direct a shot!

The barriers would lower its speed, but it would push through. “Musashi” could not assist with her gravity barriers because she was using them to handle the attacks to the port and starboard sides. The attack to the front was more important, but it was an issue of whether the automaton could switch over quickly enough.

Just as Adele realized the shell was going to hit, the color black filled her vision.

“Musashino” had moved from the side to protect her, but that was not why.

“Is that...!?”

A single high-spiced ship flew in from above and starboard to move into the low-speed shell's path.

From the bridge, Adele could see the emblem of England's Oxford Academy.

“Trumps 4 ‘Pirate Queen’ Grace O'Malley!?”

“Testament. Honestly, this is pretty sad after you said you didn't want England's help. I was hiding and watching as an observer, but I decided to do this on a whim. I know I'm disobeying my orders, but I'm used to fighting with the queen and I have a debt to repay.”

“A debt?”

“Testament,” replied Grace's voice. “When the Musashi arrived at England, that stealth ship attacked you. You had to have suggested using gravity barriers to deflect it, but that only would've worked if you gave no consideration to

deflecting the shell into England. And during the ridiculous turbulence afterwards, you protected our ship with your buffering control. So...”

So...

“I’ll repay you by protecting the nation and ship named Musashi with the Pirate Queen’s Granuaile.”

As soon as she finished speaking, the shell struck the side of her ship. The high-speed ship bent in a shallow V-shape and spun sideways into the sky to the left, but light entered its rear accelerator as if a final powerful breath.

“Don’t think the Pirate Queen is going to do nothing more than take damage!”

With the barrel-roll motion, the ship flew into the port sky and travelled in an arc toward the damaged San Martín there.

The damaged San Martín noticed and attempted to take evasive action, but the Musashi’s shellfire would not allow it. A shot to its bow stopped the vermilion ship.

“Evacuate!”

The crew of the damaged San Martín attached speed buffering spell charms for the fall and jumped off the ship. At the same time, the crew of Grace’s high-speed ship similarly jumped out into the sky while holding spell charms that would allow them to land.

A moment later, the high-speed ship performed a rotating body press on the damaged San Martín.

With a great roar, the two ships dented and bent as if intertwining.

“Port side, fall back!!”

After that single order, the two ships exploded in the sky below the Musashi's port side.

The explosive blast scattered the ocean on the Musashi's surface. This produced mist and wind, but Adele combed a hand through her hair on the bridge and spoke out once more as if to shake off a great many things.

“Continue fighting!!”

Adele's voice was followed by the aftereffects of the blast washing over the ship.

A certain confrontation was taking place on the starboard side of Tama, the Musashi's second starboard ship.

A unit primarily made up of Tres España's baseball and track teams was exchanging fire with the defense unit, the landing team travelled across Tama's bow, and warriors that crossed over from Murayama and other ships intercepted them.

“...!?”

The Valdés sister, Flores Valdés, realized a metal ball had been thrown back at them, but it was thrown like a game of catch rather than as an attack. It was targeting...

“Brother! Watch out!”

“Sister,” replied the brother in question. “This is the battlefield, so that should be obvious. But I am happy that my sister is worried about-...”

The ball hit his face as he turned to look at her. It produced a dull sound, but it was as light as a slap.

The sister saw her brother's face transform into a shallow V-shape, so she spoke to him as he crouched down and held his face.

“I told you to watch out.”

He stood back up and moved his jaw back and forth to fix it back in place.

“Sister, if you must pity someone, pity the enemy. We are Catholic, so we love pity and sympathy.”

The mention of the enemy and her brother’s gaze led the sister to look into the group of enemies. There, a single boy stood between two defense units. He was a narrow-eyed boy in a work vest and gauntlets.

He stared at the siblings and slowly raised a hand to point at the metal ball the brother held in his right hand.

“You forgot that, so I returned it.”

“Is this the Saint Elmo magic ball from when we attacked before?”

“Judge. It’s the disappearing one both of you threw simultaneously. We did manage to fix the city you destroyed...”

He pointed toward the city behind him that was accumulating rubble from the current attack.

“But don’t give us unnecessary work.”

“Testament. Then what should we do now?”

“Judge,” replied the boy.

He lowered his hips and prepared his right fist at the waist.

“How about a duel with the one rule that it be a three-pitch game.”

His voice reached them over the din of the battlefield.

“With three hits, I will defeat the Valdés siblings.”

The high-speed ship and one of the San Martíns exploded in the port sky.

The wind from that raced across the port ship, across the gap, and finally reached Tama.

From the center to the stern of Tama was an area where the city still mostly remained. The port side residential district looked like a ghost town or an abandoned city and two girls currently stood there.

One was looking up at the moons. She stood upwind and wore a vermilion uniform.

“Tachibana Gin, 3rd Special Duty Officer and Steel Master of Tres España’s Alcalá de Henares.”

With her two false arms held in a natural stance and long, narrow cases attached to each shoulder, she faced another girl.

This one wore a black Far Eastern uniform with blue armor.

“Honda Futayo, Vice Chancellor and Strike Forcer of the Far East’s Musashi Ariadust Academy.”

With a long spear in hand and her ponytail blowing in the wind, Futayo faced her opponent.

“Why are you here?”

“To restore my husband to his rightful position.”

“Your husband?”

“Master Tachibana Muneshige.”

“Ohh.” Futayo gave a nod of understanding in the night. “He was a wonderful man. I was quite inexperienced, so he was able to teach me quite a lot.”

“Really?”

Gin's eyebrows rose a bit and Futayo gave a deep nod.

"Judge. We came to a mutual understanding through combat. How I was able to guess just how much work he had put into obtaining that strength likely only worked in one direction, but..."

Futayo paused to think for a moment.

"To use an English term to hide my embarrassment, you could say the two of us had sex."

Gin felt dizzy for an instant.

She could not believe it, but no one would normally lie about that in a situation like this.

...Th-then...

How much time had there been for something like that back then? It had taken her five minutes to run to him.

...But if he finished that quickly, he must not have been feeling well.

Futayo nodded twice with a reminiscent look on her face.

"During what you could call our second round, he was very, very fast."

"Second round!? Um, he must not have been very into it! Normally, he would-...!"

"Judge. I apologize. I was not trying to say your husband had done a poor job and I am sure everyone knows how you feel. On the Musashi, everyone saw it on the PR committee's broadcast, but didn't they broadcast it in Tres España too? It was shown live."

“Live!? N-no. From what I remember, the most important parts must have been cut out!”

“I see. Catholic moral regulations can be strict. Are you not allowed to show it if there is blood?”

“Th-there was blood!?”

“Yes.” Futayo lowered her head a little. “I am sorry to have to tell you this, but I stabbed into him several dozen times at the end.”

“What? S-so you were not the one being ‘stabbed into’!?”

“Judge. I was the one doing it. I believe the exact number was around fifty. Muneshige-dono did well to protect his most vital parts.”

Gin almost fell to her knees.

...Wh-when Master Muneshige wakes up, I must erase these terrible memories!!

After carving the number fifty into her heart, she corrected her stance and spoke.

“I will make up for my husband’s disgrace!”

“Judge. Your bond between husband and wife is truly wonderful. I heard from my father that you have the skill needed to inherit the Tachibana family and your father, Tachibana Dousetsu, initially intended for that to happen.”

“Testament,” replied Gin. “But according to the Testament descriptions, the inheritance was given to Muneshige who was adopted into the family. And if that history needed to be recreated, I was meant to inherit Muneshige’s name as a double inherited name.”

As she spoke, Gin removed the twin cross swords from the hard points on her waist and held them with her false arms. She rotated her wrists once to check on the motion before continuing.

“Master Muneshige challenged me again and again. I assumed he was a foreign boy who was after the Tachibana name and was not taking it seriously enough, so I drove him away every time. However, he defeated me in the end.”

Thinking back, she realized she had not been honest back then. She had been confused by the strange new emotions she had started feeling.

“Even after that, I would suddenly attack him or put poison in his food.”

“That sounds like a fulfilling married life that would keep you on your toes.”

“Testament,” agreed Gin. “But even after all that, I continued to lose and I finally accepted him.”

I am a troublesome girl, she thought.

She had thought she could do anything, so she had refused to accept him unless he outdid every single thing she could think of. However, he had chosen to accept it all rather than outdo her and she had found that comfortable.

...But I never thought it would turn him into a bottom!!

She pulled her two Arcabuz Cruz guns from the two-pitch space in her false arms and she looked to the enemy before her.

“Now, then.”

As soon as she said that, her footing shook.

The Musashi had begun to move, but not forward as she had expected.

...It is descending!?

The ship's ocean was being deflected into the sky on either side like giant pillars of water.

The scent of wind and salt water and the white noise of surging spray vanished into the sky. Gin slowly looked up at the moons visible through that ocean canyon and then she looked back to the female warrior backlit by the moonlight.

Gin understood the battlefield had begun to move and she opened her mouth to speak to her foe.

“Let us begin.”

With that, she fired on her opponent.

Adele listened to the instructions Neshinbara sent as he approached the Musashi and she raised her right hand to give an order.

The Musashi was making an emergency descent and Neshinbara was explaining why.

“Now that the San Martín has shown itself, we don’t need to stay still and search it out. That means we only have to move forward and recreate England’s pursuit of them, but with two San Martíns and the god of war squadron around, we can’t calmly use gravitational acceleration. And now that their trick using multiple San Martíns has been discovered, they’ll start attacking more aggressively. So...”

They dropped down while temporarily abandoning the ocean on the side and bottom hulls of the ships.

“Drop down by three hundred meters. That should be about two levels for the Musashi. Lower that much and the height difference, turbulence, and mist created by the drop will prevent the god of war squadron and the San Martíns from touching you. However, there’s one thing the Musashi can use the produced wind for.”

Beyond the water spray rising up, the small Tres Españan ships of the landing team shot anchors into Tama’s starboard side. Not only did that keep them near

the Musashi, but it also prevented them from capsizing in the turbulence created by the drop. However, Adele ignored them and gave an order.

“All ships, use visual confirmation to work together and angle up by fifteen degrees. Also, move in reverse at extreme slow speed!”

“All ships, move in reverse at extreme slow speed! Over.”

As if a great weight was bearing down on them, each ship's bow tilted up to look into the sky. However, taking that action while falling caused the ships to slip backwards like leaves.

Slowly but surely, the Musashi moved backwards. While feeling the motion from her chair, Adele gave a new order. This was how Neshinbara had said to use the wind of the fall.

“All ships, open the external hull for gravitational cruising!”

On the bridge of the third San Martín which was actually the primary one, Segundo and Juana watched the Musashi's actions. It dropped down and opened its outer hull for gravitational cruising as if presenting wings to the pressure of the wind. The opening of the outer hull was guided by the air resistance, so it shook the ship yet finished quickly.

Also, the raised bows of the eight ships were pointed directly at something.

“They are looking straight at the main fleet. In that case, we should turn that way as well. We will pursue the Musashi from behind once it passes below us. And once we pursue it and push it beyond the main fleet, this will all be over. How long will it take for the accelerated Musashi to reach the main fleet?”

“Testament,” replied Juana with countless *cadena firma* set up as her workspace. “Approximately 200 seconds, chancellor. As long as we push it past the main fleet afterwards, we will win. Also, the effectiveness of the main fleet's cannons will rise after 140 seconds which is 60 seconds after the Musashi enters Tres

Españan waters. That will be the time limit for the landing team, but if the vice chancellor takes control of Tama's bridge before that, we will also win. Currently, the 2nd special duty officer is considering escape routes and regroup coordinates for the main fleet. I am also managing all of this to keep it coordinated."

"Testament. It sounds like victory will be ours, but what will Musashi's strategy be?"

"Eh?" asked Juana.

Everyone else on the bridge did the same and stared at Segundo, but he continued to examine the battlefield diagram on the table.

"Musashi must defeat any one of the ships in our main fleet, but if the fleet will scatter before they arrive, they need a way to keep at least one ship there."

"They would need something that could arrive even faster than the Musashi and could keep a ship there."

"They have two candidates. The first is their half-dragon 2nd special duty officer. He would be quite a problem if he boarded one of our ships. However, he is Catholic and is thus unlikely to attack and he has yet to arrive back on the Musashi. What they are more likely to send out ahead is-..."

At that moment, the officer in charge of monitoring the Musashi called out.

"Enemies detected on the Musashi! They are on the bow of Musashino, their front central ship!"

The enemy was...

"Technohexen! Their 3rd special duty officer is carrying anti-ground equipment and is accompanied by an escort unit!!"

Just before the Musashi opened its outer hull and established the internal ether pathway, three Technohexen took off from the runway on the bow sticking out from the front of Musashino and flew straight into the night sky.

Naito remained at the tail end of the Technohexen unit and one of the two with speed-related spells was chosen to fly in the lead.

The leading one used her full strength to pull the other two through the turbulence.

They made it through that turbulent airspace with the following two entering the slipstream created by the first.

“Nai-san! Did you drop any of your equipment!?”

“No, I’m fine! Judge, judge!”

Naito was equipped with her Schwarz Fräulein and the *schale besen* had a cart attached.

“I never thought I would have to pressurize my acceleration canon by using all the internal *auspuff* Orei Metallo that Ga-chan gave me. But with this much, it should reach the level of a god of war rifle and break through a ship’s deck.”

Her calculations said she could fire three times. She would need to approach and fire straight down, but the bullet had a penetration spell on it. If it hit, it would get through somehow or other.

The two leading Technohexen, one from the same year and one an underclassman, looked over their shoulders at her.

“Naru-san didn’t make it in time, huh!? Even if she can’t fly, I still wanted to see her give you a kiss before we took off!”

“I’m not sure being extra fired up would help much here. And wouldn’t that be a death flag?”

“Maybe,” said the leading third year while throwing away a long piece of paper with formulas and calculations written on it. “I’m going to get out of here before my tail end explodes! The rest is up to you!!”

As her broom spewed smoke, she brought it into a roll and withdrew. The underclassman then accelerated forward, dragging Naito along behind her. She pushed her broom until the gravity repulsion was about to split the end of the broom.

“Go, Naito-san!”

Naito continued straight ahead toward the center of the enemy fleet acting as the rear guard. The aircraft carrier for the mechanical phoenixes from the New World was there. A few of the phoenixes were still functioning and the aircraft carrier was taxiing them so they could be sent out as a counter attack when the Musashi charged in.

“There’s no way the Musashi can avoid those when it’s moving in!” exclaimed the underclassman. “Also, make sure they can target that ship!”

Naito replied as she flew out next to her underclassman and clung to the broom that seemed to bounce off the wall of air.

“Judge!”

As she flew in a straight line, the Musashi accelerated far behind her.

The pursuit that made up the final stage of the armada battle had finally begun.

Study:

●The State of the Musashi and Others●



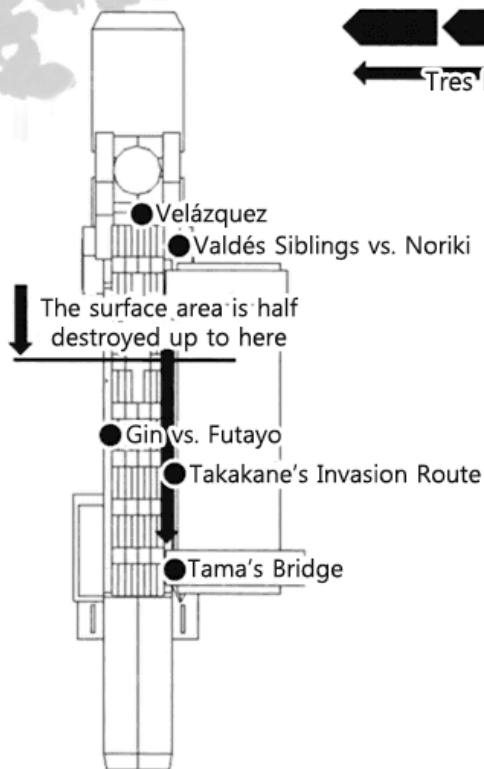
"Sis! Sis! We've been boarded by a bunch of people and are reacting to a bunch of stuff, but I don't really get it and am all excited! What should I do!?"



"Heh heh heh. Excited brother, if you stick your lower body in cold water and count to one hundred, you'll calm down. Anyway, I will explain the overall situation and give an outline of Tama where most of the excitement is happening. Make sure to thank me."

●Battlefield Diagram●

●2nd Starboard Ship – Tama●



Mechanical Phoenix Aircraft Carrier
Planning to Counter with the Phoenixes



Musashino's Attack Route

Naito Out Ahead



The Two San Martíns



"Nwohhhh! Everyone's all crammed together! Okay, I'm gonna use your map to go get in everyone's way!"



"Wait, wait, wait, wait. Where do you think you're going?"

The State of the Musashi and Others.

Toori: Sis! Sis! We've been boarded by a bunch of people and are reacting to a bunch of stuff, but I don't really get it and am all excited! What should I do!?

Kimi: Heh heh heh. Excited brother, if you stick your lower body in cold water and count to one hundred, you'll calm down. Anyway, I will explain the overall situation and give an outline of Tama where most of the excitement is happening. Make sure to thank me.

Left diagram:

Second Starboard Ship – Tama

Velázquez

Valdés Siblings vs. Noriki

The surface area is half destroyed up to here

Gin vs. Futayo

Takakane's Invasion Route

Tama's Bridge

Right diagram:

Battlefield Diagram

Mechanical Phoenix Aircraft Carrier Planning to Counter with the Phoenixes

Tres España's Main Fleet will Disperse

Musashino's Attack Route

Naito Out Ahead

The Musashi

The Two San Martíns

Toori: Nwohhhh! Everyone's all crammed together! Okay, I'm gonna use your map to go get in everyone's way!

Kimi: Wait, wait, wait, wait. Where do you think you're going?

Chapter 63: Donators on the Mound

CHAPTER 63

"Donators on the Mound"



It is always after the fact
That you realize
It was important
Point Allocation (Receiving)

It is always after the fact

That you realize

It was important

Point Allocation (Receiving)

The wind ripped through and the mist danced about.

The moons were visible in the sky and their pale light illuminated all. Down below, a boy faced a boy and girl.

They were Noriki and the Valdés siblings.

The mist surged like waves and scattered, but the brother and sister took their pitching poses. The sister threw underhand with her right arm while the brother threw overhand with his left arm.

“A three-pitch game?” asked the brother. “We will be trying to hit you with all three. But what will each side give the other if they lose?”

Noriki lowered his stance as he answered.

“If you win, I’ll smile. I won’t smile.”

“Testament,” agreed Pedro, the brother.

The sister raised her eyebrows.

“We’ll make you smile five times as much as my brother always does.”

“Sister, there isn’t enough time in a day for that. I am seriously worried about your poor arithmetic skills.”

“Call it math,” replied the sister while she and her brother continued their pitching motion.

A glowing mist came from the Holy Spell charm activators attached to their waists and enveloped them. The brother spoke first.

“We of the Bungo Navy and the Watanabe family offer a prayer to the saint of sailors, Saint Elmo.”

The sister bent and twisted her body in response.

“Mouse ‘El Fuego’ – Receive.”

Cross emblems opened in the space between them, on the backs of their hands, on their elbows, and on the other connected parts of their bodies.

“Oh, holy flame. Put the wind to our back, our target in front of us, strength in our shoulders, and a will in our hearts. Please let us remember our strength and bring light to the darkness even if there is no light in the heavens.”

“Yes,” they both nodded. “Burn, oh flame!!”

They both released their bodies. It looked less like they were throwing the metal balls and more like they were stretching themselves a step forward. The foot they brought forward rang out as they slammed it to the ground. The cross emblems over their bodies burst and flames flew from the two metal balls they threw.

“Go, magic ball!”

As soon as they shouted, a certain phenomenon occurred: the two balls vanished.

Noriki frowned.

“...!!”

A metal ball suddenly appeared right in front of his chest.

And it hit.

Flores, the Valdés sister, saw the enemy knocked backwards. While still doubled over, his back broke through the barricade of wooden containers behind him and he rolled along the deck afterwards, so Flores swung down her clenched fist.

“Strrrrrrike!! Batterrrrrrr out!!”

“Sister, you have gotten quite good at rolling your r’s recently, so I’m beginning to wonder if you have become a resident of Hexagone Française. Also…”

“Also?” asked Flores as her brother prepared to pitch again.

She understood what that movement meant.

“Look, sister. He is not out.”

The enemy had stood up. It was not quite to the point of casual, but he shook his head, rolled his shoulders, and slowly but surely stood.

Flores wondered how it was possible, but he reached into his work vest and pulled out a metal panel that had bent by about seventy degrees. Her eyebrows slowly rose when she saw that

“Do you put those in your pants and shoes too when working in dangerous areas?”

“If you understand, there’s no need to explain it.”

He threw away the metal panel and took a stance again. However, this stance was different.

“Oh?” muttered her brother.

The enemy was turned to the side with his left shoulder leaning forward. His center of gravity was pushed forward onto his left knee.

This stance left little area for their balls to hit and allowed him to thrust his fist out in a straight line.

Flores understood he was serious now, so she prepared for her throw. She made the same motions as her brother but from below and the cross emblems appeared all over her body.

All the while, she kept the enemy in the center of her vision.

“Burn, oh flame!!”

While looking to starboard, Horizon saw Noriki slammed into the barricade once more.

She sat on a cushion she had brought to the bow and she produced a cup of tea from her storage space.

“I have determined life does not progress as one wishes.”

“How many cups of tea did you stick in that space, Horizon?”

“Amazingly, it preserves the heat. I have determined it is a surprising ability.”

She reached behind and passed a new teacup to Toori.

“Roasted tea! Horizon, did your love circuits have you guess my must-have favorite!?”

“Oh? So your favorite is the same as the shop owner’s? Like mother, like son. She must have influenced you.”

“D-dammit. You just have to find a way to defy me, don’t you!?”

“Quiet,” said Horizon.

She was watching the broken barricade where Noriki stood back up, even if he was unsteady on his feet now.

“Are you sure this is not a problem?”

“Judge. Noriki’ll be fine, so don’t worry. When you work in construction on the Musashi, falling from double-digit meter heights is pretty common.”

“That is not what I meant. Should we really leave this fight to him?”

“There’s even less reason to worry about that.”

Horizon tried to listen to Toori’s reasoning, but the idiot reacted to her silence instead.

“U-um, are you mad that I kind of talked back to you there? Are you mad? Are you legit angry?”

“I have already told you countless times that I do not have the emotion of anger, so I will omit that explanation here. Now, please continue.”

“I think I’m losing confidence in myself as a student entertainer... Anyway, you don’t have to worry about Noriki. It’d be rude to him if you did.”

“Rude?”

“Yeah.” Toori sat casually next to her, rested his chin on his hand, and looked toward the battle. “Ever since he came here as a kid, he’s worked every day.”

“My memories do indeed contain observations of that scene at least a few times.”

“See? Anyway, that’s naturally given him some pretty decent physical strength. But it’s a lot of work for him to support his family on his own, so we never invited him to this kind of commotion.”

But...

“Once we entered the second year, he was always there with us. I’m sure he’d thought up all kinds of excuses, but we could tell. He wanted to hang out with us just as much as he wanted to work and support his family, so it’s just stupid to ask if it’s a problem for him to be here. If it was a problem, he wouldn’t be here in the first place.”

So...

“Just watch, Horizon. We’ve got the perfect seats here.”

Pedro, the Valdés brother, saw the enemy spit bloody saliva to the deck.

He had lost the metal panel from his vest, so the damage had to have gotten through.

However...

“Brother, we would’ve been in trouble if we hadn’t noticed.”

“Testament,” agreed the brother while truly meaning it. “He took a step back at the instant of impact.”

With the first hit, the enemy had memorized the timing with which the disappearing magic ball reappeared and he had taken a step back just after they had thrown the balls.

But the step back made it harder to hold his ground. That was why he had leaned forward to help hold his ground as much as possible.

“That was an excellent decision, but we’ve seen this method countless times. Right, brother?”

That was right. They had fought many such people in the past and so the Valdés brother spoke to Noriki.

“We set the magic ball to reappear one meter back from your stance. That is why it scored a direct hit despite you stepping back. Do you understand now that your efforts here are wasted?”

“They are not wasted,” said the enemy. “A method either works or it doesn’t and thinking about when it doesn’t is not worth my time.”

At that, the sister glanced over at her brother.

He understood.

Neither the first pitch nor the second had scored an absolute direct hit. That had been made clear with the second pitch.

The enemy had hit them with his fist.

Of course, he had not gotten in a perfect hit. After all, they were reappearing less than thirty centimeters in front of his chest, so he was unable to fully extend his right fist for a clean hit. The real reason he had stepped back for the second pitch was likely to have room to extend his arm properly.

But even if they were not clean hits, his fist had still touched both pitches.

He had deflected them, but the first pitch had hit the right side of his chest and the second had hit near his right shoulder.

That difference in location meant something.

...His timing is improving.

If a foul ball flew directly backwards, it meant the timing had been spot on. The second pitch had been close to that.

“Let me warn you,” said the enemy. “I understand the trick behind your vanishing magic ball. I’ll punch it next time.”

“Brother!”

The brother prepared for his pitch without turning to his sister.

The enemy’s spell strengthened his punches and had a dispel effect on an opponent’s spell that it recognized. In other words, he would see through their magic ball system and then score a hit. This enemy was close to being their natural enemy.

However...

“Sister, there are no intentional walks in a three-pitch game.”

He continued his pitching stance and the enemy pulled back his fist.

The boy turned to the side and raised his forward leg.

...That's the flamingo batting stance!

He would take a step forward as he made his strike. He revealed his intentions ahead of time, but he received his maximum strength in exchange. He was planning to take back the strength he lost in the dedication of the first and second pitches.

Splendid, thought the brother.

No one would face them back at home and very few other people wished to face them even in battle, so it was wonderful to have an idiot willing to go all out against them like this.

“Sister, if we are true baseball players, we must respond in kind. Give this your all and I will do the same.”

The two of them simultaneously launched their pitches.

Noriki stepped forward with a throbbing tempo in his support leg.

It resembled the timing of his pulse, but a moment later...

“...!!”

His foot crashed onto the deck and he launched his right fist.

He twisted his entire body, bent his knees, and slightly raised his lowered hips.

“!!”

As the Valdés siblings entered their follow-through, they reacted to his quick step forward.

“Too slow!”

That meant one thing.

He could not step back and hit. And if he moved faster, he would be able to hit.

As if to say he understood, Noriki added in more speed. His left arm was pulled behind and its elbow shot up above his back and his right leg kicked off the deck behind him.

“Ahhhh!”

He forcefully spun his body forward.

He moved toward empty space, but his fist tore into that emptiness. He twisted a half rotation more than usual to increase the force of his punch which he sent...

“Here!!”

With the sound of shattering glass, light scattered between him and the Valdés siblings.

A moment later, something else appeared between them: two metal balls.

One was a high line drive and the other one was on its way to hop up from below.

As the two began to overlap, Noriki punched the one coming from below.

And he hit.

...He punched them at the point of unification!? Well done!

The Valdés brother saw the ball he pitched hit the barricade over the “batter’s” shoulder.

And the ball his sister had pitched was hit back at them.

This was the result of the enemy fully seeing through their magic ball.

Part of him could not believe it, but a part of him had known this moment would come eventually.

Their magic ball made use of the donation of charity that was mentioned in the Testament. As a way of providing what they had in excess to those in need, the two of them would simultaneously “donate” the ultimate pitch to their enemy.

...But two simultaneous pitches is not the best donation for them.

The enemy could only receive one pitch at a time because a donation that would fill both their hands was not allowed.

That was why the siblings combined the two with a spell. The spell caused the two trajectories to cross and the paths and strengths of the two balls would combine into a single “donation”.

This spell pitch was only possible with a brother and sister who could perfectly match each other’s timing.

Also, the pitch combination occurred in a dedicated space created by the spell.

As a result, the single pitch would appear at the point of intersection where the two pitches had been altered into the optimum pitch.

And the other would be returned as if to say it had never happened.

“ ... ”

The brother looked to his feet. The balls he had supposedly thrown during the first and second pitches lay there.

That was because the optimum pitch had used his sister’s ball.

This was not because he was trying to make her look better. He had always helped her out in little ways.

...But that is why something has started feeling off in my left shoulder.

He had not told his sister because the timid girl might very well quit pitching if she knew.

However, they had been defeated just now. He had had a bad feeling when their enemy had deflected the second pitch upwards.

That had meant the boy was targeting his sister's ball that rose up from below.

He had unnecessarily removed the metal panel from his work clothes after the first pitch, but that had likely been to check the angle the pitch had hit him from. And if he worked in construction...

...When he was fixing the city behind him, did he research the buildings our pitches hit!?

A splendid enemy, thought the brother.

The boy had almost certainly shown up specifically to face them.

...I doubt he could have smiled even if we had won.

Meanwhile, the ball that was hit right back at the pitcher flew toward his sister.

She was standing there in a daze, but he could protect her by shoving her out of the way. However...

“...!”

The brother took action.

Horizon saw the result.

“Noriki-sama has lost.”

As she watched, the Valdés brother had brought the game to an end.

He had used his left hand to stop the ball Noriki had hit back and Toori muttered what that meant.

“He’s out with a line drive catch. But…”

“Brother! Your hand!”

Blood was spilling from the dominant hand he used to pitch. Catching the metal ball with his bare hand had caused a few nails to practically burst off the hand.

“Kh,” groaned the brother while forcing the corner of his mouth to rise and raising the ball in his hand. “Victory goes to our magic ball!”

“Judge,” muttered Noriki.

The Valdés brother turned to Tama with his sweat scattering in the wind.

“Captain Takakane! It looks like this is as far as we can go!”

The Valdés siblings’ ship forcibly removed its anchor from the Musashi.

The Musashi was already raising its speed, so the small ship would be knocked away at any moment. The other ships also removed their anchors.

“The bombardment team will begin pursuing the Musashi! Fight well, the rest of you!”

As the ships left all at once while battered by the wall of air, Noriki raised a hand down below. Blood was flowing down from the gauntlet on his right hand and he pointed at the Valdés brother’s raised left hand with that bloody hand.

“If you start now, you can still make it in time for the next Olympics.”

The Valdés brother nodded and spoke while vanishing into the distance.

“Keep an eye on the daily newspaper’s sports section.”

“You just lost your covering fire. Are you sure you want to continue? We have also sent out one of our uncontrollable Technohexen.”

Takakane shook his head at the merchant’s words and he looked to the bridge ahead of him.

“You’re the one that’s in trouble. You’ve only got 300 meters left.”

“As long as I defeat you, the distance makes no difference. ...None of this is going to make any money.”

“Then are you gonna stop fighting?”

“No.” The merchant shook his head. “If Musashi wins here, it will be a good business opportunity. As long as we collect the Logismo Oplo, money will come pouring in for me. What a wonderful time to be treasurer.”

“Even though your ships were damaged and your people injured?”

“None of that has anything to do with money. Damage to the ships and injuries occur due to the strategy we use, the actions we take, and the situation we are in, but that also means they will not occur in certain situations. However, the situation known as battle assures that money will pour in for me. Yes, I love money, so this is wonderful.”

“You really love gathering money, don’t you?”

The merchant lowered his hands and expressionlessly replied to that question.

“Make no mistake. The best part about money...is spending it.”

With that, something flew from both the merchant’s hands.

Takakane reflexively held his long bat in both hands to block them.

Two solid sounds later, the two objects were lying on the ground.

“Ten yen coins? How cheap can you be?”

“I wanted to use one yen coins, but Heidi insisted that would lower our store’s reputation.”

“That’s a hell of a way to maintain your reputation.”

“Don’t say that,” said the merchant while flicking more coins.

He sent them up and down this time to target Takakane’s head and legs.

However...

“That ain’t gonna cut it.”

Takakane rotated the long bat vertically and two more solid sounds filled the air. The two deflected coins once more fell to his feet.

“My defense won’t let anything through. I’ll knock it all to the ground in front of me. This is how I attack too. My role as vice chancellor is to perform the ultimate squeeze play.”

“So you love loss. I find that difficult to fathom.”

“Don’t say that,” said Takakane as he began to run forward.

The merchant flicked two more coins at him, but...

“That attack isn’t gonna work on-...”

His words were stopped by two loud blasts.

“!?”

Takakane stopped running and lowered his hips.

...What were those impacts just now?

Two ten yen coins lay on the ground before him, but white smoke was rising from his bat. The smoke came from the heat caused by the friction of the impacts.

“Did you use an acceleration spell on the coins like Technohexen do?”

“Technomagie is a relatively effective system of spells, but it cannot compare to the magic of money.”

The merchant brought his hands together as if praying and a clear sound rang out.

“Take a look at this.”

He pressed his hands together, lightly snapped them, and then spread them to either side. Between them, sign frames appeared with the same density as pages in a book.

“These are the contracts of all the students participating in this battle.” The merchant looked toward Takakane. “These say that one-tenth of the student’s attack power used in this battle will be supplied to me and, in exchange, I will pay them an amount equal to one-tenth their pay. On top of that, I have used a merchant’s distribution spell to divide that power among all of my coin attacks. This process requires the power to pass through several spells and gods, so the strength drops by about 50%, but...”

The merchant opened the side cover of his side tail and pulled out a small pot. He held it under his left arm and stuck his right hand inside up to the wrist.

“This is a money safe with the inside space expanded. When I need to clear my mind to think, I simply stick my hand inside and let it swim through the ocean of money. But at the moment, it is the storage space for the bullets among which I have distributed my attack power.”

Takakane held his bat up defensively while the merchant waved the hand inside the pot as if to brush something away.

This launched around a dozen coins at high speed.

“According to the Testament descriptions, the Far East had a tradition of throwing money outside in order to drive off evil. And in ancient times, spirits of the dead and the like were apparently referred to as ‘oni’. Can you stand up to this oni-repelling attack?”

“No man wouldn’t like being called an oni!”

Takakane swung his bat and began repeatedly knocking down the merchant’s bullets. Solid sounds and the glimmer of coins continually bounced up from the ground and he slowly made his way forward.

“We’re out on the ocean, so this isn’t Far Eastern airspace! We’re in the land of the oni now!!”

Chapter 64: Stubborn Ones of Both Nations

CHAPTER 64

"Stubborn Ones of Both Nations"



What situation
Is hopeless without that?
Point Allocation (Breakthrough)

What situation

Is hopeless without that?

Point Allocation (Breakthrough)

Paintings were made on the battlefield.

They were hand-drawn with fairly rough strokes.

The subjects of the paintings were varied and the canvas was the battlefield itself.

Whether in the air or on the deck, sudden strokes would rush through and paint something. It could be a river, a sun, a forest, a wall, or a stone-paved ground.

However, the painter was not within the painting. He needed a spot where he could overlook the area being painted, so he was in front of the fleet of small Tres Españan ships that had landed on the rear starboard end of Tama.

The painter who held a long paintbrush and had what resembled a large wing or feather next to him was Velázquez.

His job was to protect the small ships behind him. An interception team from Musashi would occasionally approach, but he would always raise his brush and speak.

“It’s easy to mix the colors wrong at night, so don’t get too close.”

He would then swing the brush made by the Sakai business named Sakai Store. The reinforced art tool was a high-quality product that could handle differences in perspective. One had to allow the brush to learn their art style and create an accurate representation in the painting, but as long as that was done...

“The paintings act just like the real thing.”

He painted a pond beneath the feet of one defense unit and the eight students fell in with a splash.

Once his comrades returned or tried to escape, he would paint a bridge or net to gather them. Making a slide they had to use for an embarrassing retreat would also be fun.

As an artist, he was the rear guard. That was his role. Once they crossed Tres España's provisional border, he could activate his Testamenta Arma, but he had no plans to actively fight.

...I've always been like this.

Twenty-five years before, he had been recruited for the Battle of Lepanto, but he had preferred painting to fighting.

Lope de Vega, who would later make a name for himself as a playwright, and Cervantes, a great novelist, had also been in his unit of delinquents.

...We would drink and party every night with the commander and the others.

"We would talk about how we were going to be big in the future."

...Should I lament that most of them are gone or smile because we're still alive?

"With Lope, Cervantes, Takakane, and me...how many of us are still working?"

Takakane and Fusae had died, yet they were still working.

Almost everyone else was from a younger generation. Being long-lived made the others seem even younger and he felt a need to help them out.

There's a lot we've got to do, he complained to himself while a rumbling came from the distant center of Tama.

Someone had started to fight and most likely with one of Musashi's main fighters.

“Honestly,” muttered Velázquez. “Live a full life, all of you.”

The color black soared through the night. A bluish-black Technohexen accelerated through the moonlight.

She was Margot Naito and she used her Verstärken Schale broom to roar straight toward the enemy fleet ahead of her.

She had already crossed Tres España’s provisional border.

Sporadic anti-air fire came her way, but the relative speeds and distances prevented them from perfectly targeting her much smaller form. The cannons were mostly meant for gods of war and other ships, so they were not quick enough to follow the movements of something as small as a Technohexen. Another anti-air method was to cover an entire area with ether cannons, but...

“Schwarz Hexen have plenty of reduction spells to use against that and we have spells to detect ether cannon blasts.”

Due to the persecution from the Tsirhc religion, Technomagie had a lot of spells specifically created to oppose Tsirhc spells. Those were a part of the common Technomagie that were learned before splitting between Weiss and Schwarz.

That training was also meant to make sure magical “curses” could not affect you.

“But I never thought they’d be useful in battle.”

She opened a small speedometer Magie Figur that appeared over her right eye.

It was a piece of perception Technomagie that displayed predictions of the paths of the distant fleet’s shells and ether cannons.

It was one of the common Technomagie spells called “A Thread of Longing for One who Dislikes You”. It was too small to capture anything not directly in the user’s vision, but with the fleet in front of her, it would use less *auspuff* than any other spell.

Suddenly, “A Thread of Longing for One who Dislikes You” displayed red text.

There was a large ether reading ahead of her. The actual object was god of war size, but the ether reading was much larger.

...*This is Kraken-class.*

As soon as she thought that, something blasted through the sky up and to the left.

It was a field and path made of ether. The scenery was somehow nostalgic and Naito recognized what ran through it.

“Michiyuki Byakko!?”

Fusae brushed a hand through her hair in the wind as she stood on the female god of war’s shoulder.

As Michiyuki Byakko ran, its internal OS created a wheat field in the night sky.

She watched with a smile as countless *cadena firma* appeared and dealt with the structure.

“You sure are well-made, Byakko. I wonder what kind of people made you? The different parts can be taken off and repaired, but no one can touch the automaton-style self-improving OS.”

Its artificial brain seemed to be based off an automaton’s, so this was a semi-autonomous god of war that could make decisions and predict actions on its own. It was like a mechanical creature that she only had to give general guidance to.

“Good, good,” she said while stroking Byakko’s head.

For just an instant, she looked to the sky down and to the left and she saw a black wind quickly moving behind her.

“A Technohexen? I’d like to get back at you for blasting our team members before, but I’m worried about Taka and the others. I’ll be arriving right at the time limit, so I wonder if they’ll be leaving or if they’ll have it occupied.”

A cadena firma appeared as if to answer her.

“We can intercept their attacks, so you help out the captain and his group!”

“Tes, tes,” she replied while correcting the diagram of the fleet’s path that the team members had sent her. She made a note about leaving space for the people currently away on the Musashi and attached a small sketch of her head with her signature.

She then placed her hand on Michiyuki Byakko’s shoulder and faced forward.

The moonlit Musashi lay before her.

It was not unharmed. The many attacks it had received had likely damaged the internal frames of the smoking ship so that it started to tilt.

As proof of that, the bows of Asakusa and Shinagawa would occasionally shake as if they had been struck by a wave. The warping of the internal frames was creating periodic shaking. If she could see the shaking from her distance, the internal movement had to measure at least several meters.

...They shouldn’t have forced the ship on for so long.

Even if they could continue to fly the ship, the damage would not disappear. The shaking and warping of further movement would only add on more damage. Once it got bad enough, the ship would fall apart.

That meant they would try to finish this quickly.

...They’ll take any gamble as long as it will end this quickly.

They were in a state of desperation.

“But I’m still impressed they made it this far.”

Most likely, they could only use their gravitational cruising twice more. The ships with the outer hulls expanded were also shaking. She suspected they would wait to use it until they were in danger and needed to escape, but that would be in exchange for damaging the expanded outer hulls. Also...

...The two remaining San Martíns are pursuing them from behind.

The cannon fire she heard now was those two ships firing low-speed shells at Okutama.

Fusae realized she was frowning as she looked toward the Musashi that had endured so much and dragged the battle this far along. She then once more began to think about the reason the Musashi was so desperate and so solidary.

“What is this? Calling it a nation doesn’t quite capture it, does it?”

The word “academy” did not quite fit either. Neither did “club” or “team”. What was this desperation and solidarity? She felt Tres España had the same thing, but she also felt theirs was not as definite as Musashi’s.

...What is it?

As she thought, she and Michiyuki Byakko approached the Musashi.

“Michiyuki Byakko, board the Musashi from above the second starboard ship. We’ll act as the rear guard for Taka and the others.”

She had the god of war run up a slope. The distant ship that looked like a city caught up in war would eventually be directly below, but that was not her destination. She was headed to where her beloved person was.

“Let’s bring this to an end, Michiyuki Byakko!”

Battles, sounds, and vibrations continued on the Musashi’s deck and in the air.

However, a giant entered a large, dimly-lit space surrounded by all that shaking. This giant wearing a vermilion armored outfit was Jizuri Suzaku and Naomasa stood on its shoulder with her false arm.

With the vibration and sounds of shellfire behind them, Naomasa had Jizuri Suzaku quickly advance.

“Hiro! Bring out Suzaku’s equipment! I just got word that they’ve sent out Michiyuki Byakko!”

“What? Then hurry to my hanger! I just finished the proof, so I’ll put together the equipment for you! I haven’t slept for almost a week, so go get some results!”

She’s all over the place, thought Naomasa with a bitter smile as she had the god of war walk inside.

The dimly-lit area to the left and right contained metal hangers. This was where the gods of war waited on standby, but the others had all already left and the maintenance crew was waiting around for refueling and armor replacements.

A short girl in a lab coat was waving her hand in the very back.

As Naomasa approached, the girl, Mishina Hiro, put on a soundproof headset.

“I’ll be making a few slight adjustments, okay?”

“I do like how you always give the final check despite your habit of rushing things.”

“Ah ha ha.” The girl in a Qing-Takeda Kakura Academy uniform shook her ponytail and turned her back. “That’s what Grandpa Taizou taught me to do. Anyway, Masa, about Jizuri Suzaku...”

She trailed off and Naomasa sighed before making sure no one else was focusing on them.

“After repairing it and seeing inside, you understand why I can’t leave it to others, don’t you? I probably won’t have time to insist on that from now on, so I’ll leave it to you.”

“Judge. I’ll take good care of it. To be honest, there’s a lot I don’t understand even after messing with it.”

“Really?”

“Judge.” Hiro nodded and activated the hanger’s motor so it opened with a dull noise. “It’s a handmade machine using parts someone scraped together, so it’s full of differences from the normal gods of war people buy. It has no manual and, even if the basics use the standard methods, I can’t make sense of the other parts. ...I’d really like to do a closer examination at IZUMO.”

“Actually using it comes first. ...You’ve finished, haven’t you?”

“Judge. While modifying it, I tested it out a bit in a simple virtual space, so prepare yourself.”

Hiro gave a large yawn before finishing.

“I think you can get at least one good hit in on Byakko.”

Shells struck the Musashi as it travelled through the night sky.

The two San Martíns pursued it from behind and the god of war squadron was still firing on it.

At first, the defense units had tried to focus on the starboard side where battles were being fought on Tama, but the god of war squadron had moved to the port side and the San Martíns had also started concentrating their fire on the port side.

After confirming that the defense units were stuck where they were, Adele spoke up.

“Move the defense units on Musashino’s back half to Tama! Everyone else, please take care of your assigned posts!”

After giving her orders, she thought about how to handle what was to come.

...We only have about two minutes until we reach the enemy’s main fleet!

But they would cross the provisional border before then. Neshinbara had predicted they would enter within range of the main fleet’s attacks a minute after that, so the Tres España landing unit on Tama would likely leave before then.

...But instead, Tres España’s main fleet will be firing on us.

The closer they got, the greater the density of that shelling and there was a simple way of summing up what that meant.

“The danger rises and our odds of victory drop.”

...In that case, what can we do to raise our odds of victory?

As she thought, the darkness outside suddenly bothered her. It was dark enough to clearly see Tres España’s cannon fire in the distance. Darkness was only natural at night, so she wondered why it bothered her so much.

“Oh.”

She realized why.

“ ‘Musashino’-san!”

Adele stood up and spoke to the automaton next to her.

“Please clean the ships! The Holy Spell chaff is disappearing!”

“Musashino” and the other automatons looked outside in unison.

...She’s right!

Due to being individually locked down, they had been slow to notice the change to the outside world.

From what “Musashino” could see, most of the Holy Spells caught in the air currents had vanished and only those attached to or caught on the ships’ surfaces remained.

If they swept those away, the automatons would be able to use their shared memory and that would make the coordination and control between ships much easier.

However, “Musashino” shook her head.

“No, it cannot be done. Over.”

Adele’s eyebrows dropped at that declaration. “Musashino” statistically understood that meant disappointment, so she lowered her head and continued.

“I apologize, but sending out personnel to clean would affect our operation of the ships and I have determined that would put the Musashi in danger. Over.”

“I see.”

“Musashino” saw Adele scratch at her head and “Musashino” determined they had let down the one who was attempting to make use of them.

At that point, a sudden voice came from behind as someone entered through the bridge’s door.

“In that case, ‘Musashino’, what if someone else took over for the personnel who would be sent out to clean? Then the chaff could be eliminated without issue. Over.”

These were the words of an automaton. Specifically, of the one automaton that ranked higher than “Musashino”.

“ ‘Musashi’-sama. Could you explain what you mean by that? Over.”

Adele also turned toward “Musashi” who stood just inside the rear door.

“If someone else took over for what the automatons do? Who will be taking over and what will they be doing?”

“Judge. I refer to the external information processing. As we cannot currently use our shared memory, the observations are being made based on the personal memories and decisions of the individual ship captains while also exchanging opinions via transmissions and manual labor. However... Judge. To be blunt, there is someone who can far outdo our speed and accuracy even at our best.”

“Musashi” took a step to the side and indicated someone else standing there.

“That person is Mukai Suzu-sama. Over.”

Suzu had been brought to the bridge, but she had not been told why.

The surrounding automatons were busily moving about and she had decided to stay still, but then she heard someone speak behind her.

“Judge. Suzu-sama, I will be connecting your Izumo-made Noise Neighbor perception system to the Musashi’s external information. That includes sound, gravity, heat, etc., but we will focus on the sound and attempt to eliminate as much noise as possible. ...Will you try it for a moment? Over.”

Suzu nodded and sensed Adele nodding toward her.

...How will this work?

She could not see, but she could perceive what was around her to a certain extent even without her Noise Neighbor object perception device. She did so through sound, wind, scent, and heat.

...But isn't that...something anyone can do?

Nevertheless, “Musashi” spoke.

“Suzu-sama, you were the first to notice the existence of the third San Martín earlier. And based on what you said, I believe you had more or less noticed the existence and location of the first and second ones. However, it was far too obvious a thing to you and you were unaware of our strategy and countermeasures, so you assumed everyone else already knew. Over.”

“Um, Suzu-san? Can you hear where the San Martíns are now?”

“Judge,” affirmed Suzu. The sounds of the shells were approaching, but she could tell where they came from. “Here and...around here? Yeah. They’re...far away, so I can’t...tell very well.”

She pointed to the area behind her head. The sounds of shellfire were loud, so she thought this was an easy question. Not only did the entire Musashi shake each time, but she could tell the shapes of the San Martíns and gods of war flying around.

“Musashino” took a step back for some reason.

“We can only reach a conclusion about echoing sounds after a thorough examination, so we cannot reach an immediate answer. I have determined this is a difference in our conjecture policy having to do with priority and estimations. Over.”

“Judge.” “Musashi” could be heard pulling out something like a long thread.

“Judge, Suzu-sama. I will be attaching the cable. There is also a diagram of the Musashi in front. Can you use that to point out the locations you sense? If you do, we can add the indicated location to our battlefield map. Over.”

“Judge.”

Suzu nodded and tilted her head to the left to point Noise Neighbor’s connection port toward “Musashi”.

After a small and solid sound, she felt the weight of the connection and returned her head to normal.

“...!?”

Adele saw Suzu suddenly raise her hands to her face and tremble.

The nearby chair fell over, but she stood up on her tiptoes.

“Ah.”

She trembled and touched her own face as if to confirm the shape of her own body.

“Ahhhhh!!”

Suzu spread across the sky.

She suddenly felt as if she were not standing on anything at all. She next perceived the sea and sky continuing on forever in front of her, but she soon focused specifically on the sea down below that surrounded everything.

...I'm falling!

She subconsciously took a step back and felt a soft sensation on her back.

“Eh? A-a clean cushion?”

“Judge, Suzu-sama. This is ‘Musashi’. I am supporting you, so do not worry. I took the liberty of scanning your nervous system and I see your perception stretches in every direction. Over.”

Suzu did not understand what that meant.

“My body can...touch anywhere? And hear anywhere?”

When she tried to touch something with any part of her body, she could feel it. The same went for heat and sound. When she walked, she could feel the

movement of the air on her back and head and the dirt beneath her feet. The light of the sun, the coolness of the shadow her body cast, and the chill of the damp ground were all things that reached every part of her body.

And sound came from everywhere. So why?

“Is everyone else...different? You aren’t...are you? I...I can’t see... I’m...lacking...in that way, but...”

But...

“That doesn’t mean...I can sense this...more than everyone else, does it?”

“U-um, Suzu-san!?”

She heard Adele’s voice to the left in the sky. The other girl could see her, so Suzu tilted her head and Adele spoke.

“W-we can all sense the same things you can. I-it’s just...u-um, you sense it a lot cleaner than we do! Because we’re all so filthy! Our hearts are clouded!!”

Suzu did not entirely understand, but it seemed how she sensed things was useful. That made her want to help, but she also laughed at Adele’s strange way of saying it.

“That was mean.”

“No, no, no. This much is perfect! Anyway, um, Suzu-san? Please help us out.”

“Right,” answered Suzu.

She wondered what the sensation in her heart was. It was possible that her own ability was truly necessary. It may have only been taking over a role someone else usually filled, but...

...I can trust that I have this ability, right?

It was not the size of her ability that mattered. It was whether she had it or not.
So...

“Um.”

She faced the vast world beginning with empty space and spoke to the people there.

“Thanks.”

A short break arrived as Suzu helped on the bridge. The automatons were already working to clean away the chaff, but that was why a gap occurred until everything was shifted over to Suzu.

“So I need to eliminate as many of the enemy attacks as I can.”

Asama stood on the front starboard end of Takao and faced the Tres Españan fleet to the north.

She had already finished setting up Umetsubaki and was completing her follow-through.

She had fired an arrow. The large double arrow flew into the western sky. One of the arrows provided a special effect and the other one attached to the top allowed it to break through barriers. It was heavy and could not fly far, but...

“What do you think Shinto spells are for!?”

She gathered strength in her green eye and watched the accelerating arrow along with Hanami.

“Hit!”

She nodded and sounds of destruction came from one of the Tres Españan ships in the western sky.

The double arrow had scored a direct hit and destroyed the defensive spells applied around it.

A cramped room with a low ceiling was surrounded by windows on three sides and had a bridge on the exterior of either side. It was the bridge of Ship 12 in Tres España's main fleet and it shook due to the enemy attack they had been unable to stop.

The twelve square meter bridge had divine transmission and command equipment lined up along the windows and the man with a captain's armband asked what had caused the ether light that had burst in the sky ahead of them.

“What was that attack!? Does the Musashi have a weapon with enough accuracy to hit at this range!?”

“Testament! It was their gunner shrine maiden! She temporarily reduced and eliminated the defensive spells around the ship. The lower arrow of the double arrow seems to have had a spell allowing it to penetrate low-level barriers.”

“What effect did the upper arrow have!? It wasn't a fire spell, was it!?”

“Testament. I have detected no reaction in the ship's firefighting spells, so there is no danger of explosion or fire!”

“Then what was it?”

The captain and everyone else tilted their heads and the ship's alarm began sounding perhaps due to the temporary lack of defensive spells.

Warning signs with crosses began flashing on the message boards and divine transmission boards.

The captain sighed and instructed the navigator to end the warning.

“Was that meant as a warning? Or was she serious but didn't manage anything more than a warning? I guess the infamous gunner shrine maiden isn't all she's

cracked up to be. Look up the address of her shrine and send a divine text saying 'thanks for the warning'. Then continue firing."

Everyone laughed bitterly, but the control officer looking down at the stake-like arrow said something.

"Huh? That stake is hollow...and made to come apart."

Confused, everyone focused on him.

"It was empty? Did she forget to put in the explosion spell?"

"I was thinking we would've been in trouble if it had hit the window, but if it was empty, the window's defenses might have been enough."

They all laughed and more laughter joined them.

"Ha ha ha! Isn't it great that this didn't turn into a disaster!?"

A pink naked man stood at the center of them all.

"Eh?"

None of the people on the bridge knew how to react to the sudden turn of events and the naked man gathered the rest of his body that was leaking in through the ventilation as a gas. Once he finished, he raised a hand and showed off his white teeth.

"Good evening! I am no one suspicious! I am Itou Kenji, an obscene spirit known as an incubus! I have visited your ship this evening to make friends!"

"Um, so that stake was...?"

"Yes! I was crammed inside with a friend of mine! Now! Let us begin the friendship ritual!"

Itoken suddenly reverted to gas and the navigator frantically spoke up.

“What do you mean the friendship ritual?”

“Ha ha! I said I am an incubus, didn’t I!? We will of course be absorbing each other’s life force!”

All of them exchanged a glance before crying out and rushing toward the door or hitting the switch on the wall for the holy water sprinklers.

However, those that touched the door and those that touched the switch reacted in the same way.

“Hm?”

The door’s keyhole and the sprinkler switch were filled with something sticky.

Neither would move and the sticky substance spoke.

“Trying to leave after a special envoy of friendship has arrived? How very rude! But do not worry! I, Nenji, shall lend a helping hand for the sake of our mutual friendship!”

Asama’s shoulders drooped as she listened to the voices coming from the sign frame next to her.

“Now, everyone! Follow Brother Itoken’s lead! It’s time for incubus exercising! One, two, one, two. Now with the person next to you! Okay, make a proper circle there. Oh, you need to put in a little more effort. Or do you need me to instruct you in Español? Why are you crying?”

The screams could likely be heard the world over.

...I’ve helped with something horrible.

Then again, she had initially planned to fire a shot straight through the bridge. However, that would have caused a variety of problems, so she had gone with Kimi's suggestion.

"See you next week in your hometown!!" said the voice on the sign frame.

...Are you announcing your future crimes?

Hanami tried hitting Asama's lowered head to cheer her up.

At any rate, Asama looked into the distance and saw the enemy ship filled with screams had stopped firing. Also, the other ships were afraid of meeting the same fate as their fellow ship, so they surrounded themselves in walls of light.

They had strengthened their defensive spells with a focus on physical attacks.

...But that means they can't fire as freely as before because they have to make sure they don't destroy their own barrier from the inside.

That lowered the frequency of the shellfire. They would probably start firing again once they reached a stable position, but this still created a gap and Asama hoped it was enough to let Suzu get started.

Asama corrected her posture and spoke to the others.

"The rest is up to you."

Suzu thought on Asama's words.

...Asama-san is relying on me.

During writing class, she had relied on her, so it was time to pay her back.

Suzu sensed what lay before her.

She was borrowing the Musashi's senses, so the sensation of the world spread out around her.

Waves covered the ocean as far as she could sense and the sky contained ships, clouds, and the wind.

...Here, here, and over there.

“Ship, wind, coast, cloud, sound.”

To her, everything in the world resembled some form of pain. Pressure, heat, and sound would all hurt if they were strong enough, so it was a little strange for that sensation of pain to continue on forever. The wind right next to her was connected to the wind far away and she could touch both those identical pains at the same time.

It was like lying in a futon. One could feel a warm sensation in their head or cheek at the same time as feeling the same sensation in their feet. The never-ending ocean was the bottom of the futon while the sky and wind were the blanket placed over her head. She was where her head was, but she could still touch the ocean and sky by her feet. After all, that painless pain was there and her senses brought it to her.

She understood it all. The sounds of shellfire were like a strong pain, but she could feel and hear a lot of it.

It's like lightning, she thought. Yes. It feels a bit wrong, but I like thunderstorms. When I told Toori-kun, he said he did too, so maybe the world is painful for him too.

“Here.”

There were sea birds, what she guessed was a whale, and more and more.

Adele saw something unbelievable.

Suzu was smiling and creating a world with the ether light model.

She laid out the sea down below, lined up the Musashi and the enemy ships in the air, and occasionally shifted the location of the gods of war as if she had just noticed. To the south, she used stroking motions of her hands to create the northern coast of the mainland as well as the cities, villages, mountains, and rivers there.

Her fingers added clouds in the sky and she drew ribbons indicating the lines of wind. When handling a stealth ship, she hesitated for a moment which indicated it was not perfect even with her in control, but otherwise...

“Um, um...”

As Suzu happily created that world with a smile, “Musashino” spoke in a daze.

“She is perfectly perceiving everything within a range of thirty kilometers with only a slight margin of error. Over.”

The meaning of “perfectly” was likely a little different here. Automatons would carefully examine the entire area, so if they tried to perceive the ocean, they would be distracted by the movements of the waves and they would try to grasp everything about the changing sounds.

But Suzu clearly understood how to appropriately select what information to gather and what to let slide.

Adele then thought about the world taking form at Suzu’s hand.

Suzu was often in the academy’s reference room. The chancellor had pointed that out during writing class before.

According to Suzu, she enjoyed it because the reference room contained a lot of teaching materials she could touch with her hands. From that point on, she had always been in charge of searching for anything in the reference room.

However, that room naturally contained a certain large object.

...A 3D map of the Far East.

It was the size of several desks and was difficult to get out the door. If Suzu spent time in that room, she would have touched that map quite a bit.

“That means she’s memorized the shape of the Far East with her hands.”

As Adele muttered to herself, Suzu finished creating England and let out a breath. Adele thought she was done, but the girl then approached the model of the Musashi and smiled as she created something on Musashino’s bow.

“Toori-kun and...Horizon.”

Why am I not surprised, thought Adele as she looked at another model. It was of a Technohexen leading the wind toward the Tres Españan fleet.

Naito was about to reach her destination.

Naito soared through the night.

The anti-air fire had already grown denser and some spells and homing bullets were being fired now. The best way to deal with that was to...

...Come in from below!

Most aerial ships floated in the sky using a virtual ocean just like the Musashi did. Some used wind instead, but most used an ocean because the water also helped with defense and firefighting.

But that meant most ships did not have any weapons on the bottom.

Standard practice was to use homing bullets for anything below the ship.

That was why Naito checked on the enemy ships’ lines of fire and made her way down below them.

Whenever a homing bullet arrived, she immediately activated a defensive spell. The homing spells used motion or shape recognition, so if she reduced the light and vanished into darkness for an instant, most of the homing bullets lost sight of her. She was already wearing black, so it was easy for her to blend into the darkness.

...Now where's the enemy ship I'm after?

She spotted it.

The enemy fleet had started to split to the left and right, but one ship in the very back had yet to move.

That mechanical phoenix aircraft carrier had an important reason to remain facing the Musashi.

As the Musashi approached in a straight line, the aircraft carrier could send out high-speed attacks with the phoenixes' large stakes.

Of the surviving phoenixes, one was being taxied. Once preparations were complete, it would be launched for its attack on the Musashi, so Naito had to stop it.

Her targets were the flight deck and that first phoenix. If she could manage it, she would also target the bridge. But to attack the ship from above, she needed to ascend while evading the anti air fire.

And so she did so. She slipped between the shells and spells, passed through the gaps in the noise, and rose toward the twin moons.

"Okay."

Once she arrived, she looked down at the long flight deck and suddenly noticed something odd about her surroundings.

...They aren't firing?

The aircraft carrier was preparing to launch the mechanical phoenix, but the enemy was not attacking her. Wondering why, she looked around and noticed all the shellfire was directed at the Musashi.

She tilted her head at why they were ignoring her and she looked back down.

As soon as she did, she sensed something massive behind her.

“!?”

As she turned around, a god of war flew toward her.

...Eh!?

During the early stages of the battle, a few of the gods of war had been intercepted and damaged.

They had supposedly returned to their ships, but the one behind her had its right arm hanging limply as proof of its damage.

She remembered it. It was the one whose right side she had fired through.

To a human, a shot to the right side would have damaged the arteries and severed the nerves and the limp right arm was proof of that. The pilot should be in need of emergency care.

“Is that not enough of an injury for you to fall back until the battle’s over!?”

She understood that this god of war was targeting her specifically. It had likely hidden below the aircraft carrier and circled around when she had ascended.

...That’s the same method I used earlier!

She was already attempting to evade. She used Schwarz Fräulein as a shield, raised her butt, and tried to drop straight down.

But she was too slow. She had opened an attack spell, so she was unable to open an acceleration spell quickly enough.

...*Not good!*

She thought that for a variety of reasons as the charging god of war swung its left arm at her. With one arm out of order, it could not keep its balance while holding a weapon, so it attacked barehanded.

The steel fist cut through the air as it flew her way.

“...!”

It struck her like a lariat and she tumbled sideways through the air.

Schwarz Fräulein broke and the black Technohexen bounced through the air.

“ ... ”

She went limp and fell to the depths of the night. Above her and beyond Schwarz Fräulein and its broken *schale*, the god of war saw her go limp, scatter feathers, and sink down.

On the Musashi, the members of the defense units were struck by a few different types of attacks.

Tres España’s landing team attacked them on the starboard side, the San Martíns fired on the port side, the main fleet fired on the front, and the gods of war attacked the entirety of the ship.

Not a single spot of the ship could go undefended.

“Dammit!”

A student yelled out from a defense unit on the starboard side that switched between firing from behind cover, charging forward, and defending.

“Can we really keep up this defense!?”

The enemy had arrived within eyesight of Tama’s bridge.

The enemy was in a bit of a hurry, but the defenders could not let them through. The loss of even one of them seemed dangerous as the boy shrank back from the enemy’s attacks. And that fear allowed the enemy to advance.

“I’m so pathetic!” shouted the boy who had cowered from the enemy bullets and could not fight back from behind cover.

However, no one could criticize him or even focus on him at the moment.

They did not have enough manpower or weapons and the enemy was numerous. There were a lot of reasons to complain.

Even now, another member of the defense unit collapsed. When the boy saw that, he gasped and yelled out once more.

“Dammit! Why!? Why are we doing this!?”

He shouted toward the enemy that actually seemed to increase in number as they fired on them.

“Even if we win, we’ll just be making an enemy of the world! So...”

He spoke his mind.

“Isn’t this enough!? Haven’t we done enough!? Let’s just quit here!”

The others around him were left speechless. Everyone was thinking the same thing, so they exchanged a glance. However, an upperclassman sporadically firing arrows spoke to the boy.

“It’s true I sometimes wonder why we’re doing this.”

He nocked the next arrow.

“But if you can’t find a reason, then go join another academy.”

“ ... ”

The younger boy fell silent and the upperclassmen kept his eyes on the enemy while continuing.

“Listen. Whether it’s time to quit and whether this is enough are your own issues. Don’t ask us. Ask yourself and go where you can find your own reason to fight. After all, Musashi is moving on the policy set by our idiot of a chancellor and our princess who doesn’t know who she is. I don’t know how crazy you have to be to advocate both world domination and world peace, but...”

As soon as he said “but”, a bullet grazed his right cheek.

He gave a quick “kh”, but only shook his head once and looked to the right. The others began to move in concern, but he stopped them with a hand and drew the bowstring.

“You’ll be happier if you go while there’s still somewhere you can go.”

“Are you...?”

“Don’t ask. It’ll make me feel too important. ...At any rate, just stick with the people like me for the time being. There are a lot of others like this. Of course, the most obvious example is over there.”

He rubbed his right cheek and used the same finger to point toward Musashino’s bow while still looking forward.

“Those two are there, aren’t they?”

The others turned toward Musashino’s bow.

“Huh?”

The idiot on the bow held a microphone and the upperclassman frowned once he noticed as well.

“Okay, everyone,” said the idiot. “I have an important announcement to make.”

That being...

“There’s a lot to complain about in the battle right now, don’t you think? So if you find anything like that, how about I stop by to comfort you? My jokes are a lot of fun.”

“Waaaah!”

Everyone across the Musashi cried out in fear.

“If we don’t work harder, that idiot will stop by to get in our way!!”

Toori and Horizon listened to the different reactions on the divine network.

“Stay away! Stay away, okay!? I’m serious about that!”

“Before, I thought our leaders didn’t understand all the trouble we go through, but actually having those leaders join us would be even worse! I never realized that before! This isn’t fair!”

“E-everyone, move forward! If we don’t look like we’re doing this properly, that idiot’ll sneak up behind us and ruin all our hard work!”

No matter what direction Toori looked, he saw people charging forward while raising battle cries. But soon...

“S-stop watching us, you idiot!” someone said. “Look up into the sky and hum or something!”

Horizon nodded twice.

“You are hated on the level of a national treasure. They are reacting the exact same way that elementary school did.”

“Don’t be silly. They’re just tsundere. They’re saying, ‘I-it’s not like I want you to stop by or anything!’ So what should we do? Should we start with the right since they’re doing the best job of pretending not to like me?”

“Stay away! This is a dangerous battlefield, so stay away!”

“What? But what’re you going to do? I’m supplying you with Blessings, but aren’t you having trouble?”

“If you show up, it’ll go from ‘having trouble’ to ‘completely hopeless’!!”

“Huh? Aren’t you missing like five levels in between there? If this was strip mahjong, it’s like someone got a Heavenly Hand in on you.”

“Yeah, and you’re the one that did it!!”

“What?” Toori frowned at that and started pointing here and there. “Who’re you saying did it, you idiot!? Hey, you! And you with the unpopular-looking face over there! Your voices are hurting my ears, so I’m gonna go quiet you down if you keep it up! While you keep complaining, I’ll sneak up behind you naked and hit you in the back of the knees!”

“I-isn’t the chancellor supposed to be on our side!?”

But everyone took in a deep breath and gave a clear response.

“Honestly,” they said all over the Musashi. “Keep quiet, you idiot, and leave the battles to us!!”

“Sure,” said Toori as he sat back down.

However, Horizon tilted her head next to him.

“Even so, I have determined the situation is not good. I have determined we simply have insufficient personnel and a determined spirit can only take them so far.”

“Then should we help?”

Horizon briefly froze in place at that sudden voice.

She exchanged a confused glance with Toori.

“What was that?”

“What should we do?” said the voice again.

It came from behind them, so they turned around and found a fifteen centimeter super-deformed dog-like creature standing upright.

“A kobold?”

Adele and the others on the bridge heard Heidi’s voice.

“It was kobolds! Yes, it was the ore kobolds live in! I was thinking of dropping the rocks on that glasses man’s house for free, but it looks like this was a good thing after all! I had the mercantile guild help out for free and place the ore on top of most of the Musashi’s ether fuel pipes!”

So...

“The kobolds will accept odd jobs, so anyone who can fight should fight!!”

“Even so,” said “Musashi” while expressionlessly beginning calculations on a sign frame. “Kobolds require almost no pay, but saving up enough currency to pay them will still cause economic deflation. Also, the kobolds will consume our ether fuel and having fewer people assist will reduce the valuable ether dedications the Musashi takes as a tax, so...”

“H-how about we have the kobolds construct a 24-hour workplace where they can mass-produce products to sell cheaply but quickly?”

“That will be something else to work on in the future. Over.”

But the automaton then continued.

“Regardless, they will be useful in the current situation. I will approve it. Over.”

Cheers rose from the different ships as those helping with the work inside the ships rose to the deck. Adele thought while listening to their voices.

...The most meaningful part is making it possible to have actual shifts.

This went beyond those fighting on the deck. The automatons and people working inside the ships could leave most of the transportation and communication jobs to the kobolds.

...Do what you can.

Just as Adele prepared to say that aloud, she heard someone else speak.

“Okay, take care of this, all of you.”

“Please.”

A voice came from the leader sitting on the Musashino’s bow with a girl sipping tea next to him.

“I, Aoi Toori, and Horizon Ariadust are here and we won’t run away. So...”

Shells reached that area, but gravity barriers deflected them. Most of them made it dangerously close to him, but he showed no concern.

“I’m sure there’s a lot you can’t do or want to give up on, but...”

But...

“Leave all those impossibilities to me for now.”

And in exchange...

“Please, tell yourself it’s possible for you.”

“Please.”

When that word was repeated like a nod, the people fighting on the Musashi’s decks took a breath in unison.

They exhaled, inhaled, and then exchanged a glance.

I guess we’ve got no choice.

Just this once, okay?

You’ll pay for this later.

All those things were written on their faces, but in the end, the corners of their mouths rose and their shoulders shook a bit.

“Judge!! You can trust in us, Musashi Chancellor!!”

An order came from the bridge.

“Everyone, line up!!”

“Judge!”

This was the first thing they had learned in training, so they all checked each other’s locations.

“Get ready!!”

“Judge!!”

A short pause.

“Everyone, begin where you left off!”

“Judgment!”

Judge, judge, judge, judge. We make our judgment here.

“Yes, we have already received holy judgment!”

“We are those who carry our king’s possibility and our princess’s emotion!”

“Yet we are those who will keep sorrow from our king and our princess!!”

As they cried out, they all tossed there tiny portable rations in their mouth.

“Defend! All we can do now is endure for a while longer!”

Everyone fired, endured, and pushed forward. As if restarting their training, they focused on what they had to do despite their exhaustion and injuries.

“We’re not so stupid...”

The enemy pushed back.

“...that we won’t listen to what that idiot of a chancellor asks of us!”

The two sides clashed yet again, but the vermilion armor and uniforms also endured while the metal spikes on the soles of their shoes groaned under the strain. They opened any gap as if thrusting their way in and they fired and attacked to break down the defenses.

“Don’t get carried away! We’re no idiots either!”

“That’s right!” shouted one of the students in a vermilion uniform. “We’ve come this far bearing our decline! We’re here to keep our sun from setting! It feels like the entire world is telling us to set, but we’ve kept fighting! Every day, we talk about it in the cafeteria, chat about it on the way home, and think about it while staring at the ceiling while going to sleep, and we’ve come this far to make it a reality!”

“Yeah!” replied another one while charging forward. “We’re filled with our own ruin!!”

As if in response, the shellfire from the sky ahead increased. The Españan main fleet was getting closer.

It was about time for Tres España’s landing team to leave, but for that very reason...

“Heeeenaaaareeessss!!”

“Testament!!”

The vermilion ones held up their weapons.

“The empire on which the sun never sets has an announcement for the dead nation on which the sun never rises!”

First, one of them shouted into a voice amplification spell using a *cadena firma*.

“Triiiiiunfooooo!!

The others repeated after him.

“Triunfo!”

And again...

“Victoooooriaaaaa!!”

“Victoria!”

“Glooooooriaaaaa!!”

“Gloria!”

More voices joined in.

“Triiiiiunfo! Tres España!!”

“Victoooooria! Tres España!!”

“Glooooooria! Tres España!!”

“Heeeenaaaareeeessss!!”

“He! Na! Res!! Henares! Henares!! Henares!!!”

They all held their weapons forward.

“Testament!!”

And they charged.

The sounds of the clash were equal at first, but the Musashi side was soon pushed back on the starboard end.

The vermilion vanguard had determined the path they could travel down fastest and ran down the passageway in an arrow-shaped formation.

Also...

“Climb over them! Jump over them! We’re not the track team for nothing!!”

They took three-dimensional action. They even used their own teammates as stepping stones as they charged in.

But Musashi responded.

“Defend to the front!! Only worry about anything else once you’ve done that!!”

However, the enemy’s attacks were dense and they pressed forward even when those in front collapsed.

“Dammit!”

While pinned in place by the concentrated aerial attacks of the gods of war, they cried out.

“Hold your ground!!”

They recalled the greatest principle of their training, but the enemy’s attacks were overcoming even that.

“What good is that!? If we just hold our ground they’ll climb over us!”

Even as they said that, the enemy pushed in and tried to climb over.

But then a sharp yet awkward voice reached them. It was Suzu’s.

“They’re...coming.”

No.

“They’re here!!”

A moment later, a giant form appeared overhead from the rear starboard side. It was white, but it had the Musashi Ariadust emblem on the side.

“A transport ship!?”

As the transport ship quickly passed by overhead, a few shadows dropped down onto Musashino’s bridge.

They were the Musashi representatives who had gone to England.

However, they were not alone.

Far back on both the port and starboard sides, definite shellfire could be heard.

In the night sky, something was visible near England to the north and toward the mainland to the south.

“That’s...the English fleet!!”

The ships of the fleet had the Trumps emblem on the side. The ones to the north said 5-1 and the ones to the south said 5-2. The number 5-3 also arrived and it was obvious what this meant.

“Sir Drake is coming from the north while Sir Hawkins and Cavendish are coming from the south after sending Musashi’s citizens to IZUMO! But...”

England was supposed to leave everything to the Musashi and not take part.

“Why!?”

“It is simple. A pirate that obeys his nation is no pirate. Rather than worry about what I think, a true privateer will ignore me and bring back results.”

The Fairy Queen spoke quietly while standing on the Tower of London’s Andamio de la Ejecución that would no longer be used. She used the drawn Ex. Caliburn like a cane as she watched the distant battle and addressed the vice chancellor and vice president behind her.

“Honestly, England may be ruled by the Far East someday.”

“Wh-wh-wh-why do you say that, Your Majesty?”

“Think carefully while you watch. If I hand my throne over to Mary and that ninja’s child, the child will be half Far Eastern.”

She laughed and snapped her fingers.

“Nicholas. Use the Great Seal to approve of the negotiation with the Far East concerning Mary.”

“Testament!”

Just as Nicholas's smiling face appeared in a sign frame, a great impact ran through London's sky. Like an umbrella to the night sky and moonlight, England's giant seal and approval for this attack was drawn in ether light.

Elizabeth looked up at it and gave a quiet sigh.

"Save you from anything."

She took in a breath.

"In English, 'you' can refer to more than just one person. So..." The queen snapped her fingers again. "So I am still keeping my promise. Have Howard send out the other ships. Also send out the pirates, Grace, and I'm sure there are others who can go. ...I will scold them for this! I would scold them all, so tell them to escort the Musashi to IZUMO after the battle ends. Honestly, all of them are far too kind."

The vice chancellor and vice president's shoulders shook and the queen crossed her arms, gave a snort, and looked to Walter and Milton's backs on the road down below.

"And so am I. After this battle is over, we all need to attend a meeting to rethink our actions!"

On the road in front of the Tower of London, Milton and Walter watched the battle to the southwest.

However, Milton was focused on something other than the transition on the battlefield.

"She's gone..."

Walter did not reply, but Milton did not mind.

"We lost our master twenty years ago and now it's happened again. Why do I have to be stuck with this mute moron? If only Akiage Hisaie, the other survivor

of the Amako Ten Braves, was here. But he parted ways with us twenty years ago and vanished after fighting in a number of battles against Mouri.”

Milton saw Walter give a small nod at that.

“If he had been with us when we were swept to England two years ago, do you think he would have stayed with us? If he had, he could have seen something truly interesting.”

After all...

“A ninja who loves well-endowed blondes is exactly what that idiot was when he was younger.”

So...

“Go, you fools! Just as we did back then!”

Chapter 65: One who Longs for 27.431m

CHAPTER 65

"One who Longs for 27.431m"



That distance has no meaning
What is desired
In that distance?
Point Allocation (Run)

That distance has no meaning

What is desired

In that distance?

Point Allocation (Run)

Shirojiro scattered money around.

Each time he swept it from the coin pot and into the air, he felt definite pleasure. The sensation of grasping the coins in his fingers and the sensation of them leaving those fingers and entering the air were both splendid.

...Those who simply stockpile their money are such fools! They do not know this feeling!

Any who had never enjoyed themselves scattering money into empty space like this were missing out.

Ah, next I need to take a bath in money. And in the future, I need to fill a pool with gold coins and feel them scraping across my entire body.

But what can I do after that?

I can't imagine anything, but that simply proves I am still not a true merchant. Once I become one, my destination will be far beyond a mere pool. It will be something larger. Something like...yes.

“The world!”

“Hey, Shiro-kun?” said Heidi over divine transmission. “Your bodily data is showing a crazy amount of endorphins in your brain. Are you okay!?”

Do not worry. Money will bring victory. Money is victory. And tonight I will spin you like a top. I too shall spin.

Such a wonderful feeling. Money is carrying my power.

However, the baseball player before him was deflecting all of the several dozen coins he was throwing. The coins were scattered at the man's feet like tiles.

Even when Shirojiro altered the angle or fired them upwards so they would drop down from above, the enemy deflected them all. This was an unbelievable opponent. Not only was he not distracted by greed for the money, he did not try to pick it up off the ground afterwards.

“Don't waste money!!”

“You're the one doing it!!” shouted back Takakane while deflecting the coins down so powerfully that they stabbed into the wooden deck.

Shirojiro then pulled another coin pot from the other side tail and set the two pots on his waist hard points.

“Double the money!”

He now scattered the ten yen coins in two fan shapes.

However...

“Don't underestimate the baseball team!”

Takakane held his bat out a short bit and deflected them. He continued deflecting without end. Clear sounds filled the air as he moved the bat around in every direction as if making it dance.

“Thousand Squeeze Infinite Set!”

Takakane moved forward.

A hard shower of coins poured down like a gun on rapid fire, but...

...I can see them!

The enemy was definitely an amateur. The positions of the pots were fixed and he only swung his hands by starting with his arms lowered and crossed and then swinging them upwards and outwards for a backhand. When the starting position was fixed and the pitching motion was the same, there was nothing to fear. Takakane only needed to determine in what order to intercept the coins.

And so he moved. Any that would not actually hit him he thought of as outside the strike zone. He crouched down to shrink that strike zone and he leaned forward as he started moving.

But...

“...?”

He heard the merchant named Shirojiro shake his head and speak.

“Take this kickback!!”

His voice brought sound to the deck all around Takakane.

It was the sound of money. As if jumping off the deck, the money Takakane had deflected around him all flew upwards. And all the coins rapidly flew straight toward him.

...Is this...?

“Did you place your power inside the fallen coins again!?”

“I can still see them after they fell, so they belong to me. And if I distribute my power into them once more...”

Takakane heard the sound of money. He heard the sound of countless objects flying from the ground in every direction. He heard the sound of a spell.

They formed multiple fan-shaped formations and flew toward him.

Takakane felt the massive and heavy density of this attack. He could only say there was a great variety to these attacks, but there was one other thing he could say.

“Is this the power of money!?”

“Yes, this is the power of money!!”

This was the power of a merchant.

Not bad, he thought.

The merchant was fixated on that money and that was proof he was going all out. And in that case...

...It isn't all that cool, but I've gotta do it!

He would use it. He slid his hand to the bat's grip and exited his bunting stance.

“Slug bunt!!”

“Wow,” said one of the people watching at a distance.

A single man was swinging around his long bat in the center of the countless fired and thrown coins.

There were countless coins and they targeted him from every direction, but he remained unharmed.

“_____!”

All of the deflected bullets lay prostrated at his feet.

However, the coin bullets knocked to the deck quickly regained power and shot up once more. To combat them, Takakane repeatedly switched between a long swing and a bunt and between holding the bat to the right and the left.

“Ohhhh!!”

With repeated left and right swings, he moved forward while almost spinning around.

Whether his enemy or his ally and whether active or simply watching, almost all of the nearby students gulped.

Countless clear sounds filled the area and all the sparks and smoke obscured his form while Takakane made use of his ability.

Behind and to either side of him, the Tres Españan students exchanging metal bullets with Musashi's defensive units reacted.

“...!!”

They raised their voices of support to make sure he could hear them.

And a distinct response came from beyond all the sounds of deflected coins.

“Who do you think I am!?”

Their vice chancellor shouted back at them while literally defending the front line all on his own.

“I'm your captain, so it's my job to support you all!!”

Takakane mentally nodded his head.

...This is who I am!

How many different powers was he taking on at once right now?

It was more than just ten or twenty. Not even one or two hundred was enough. He was enduring more attacks than that while still moving forward.

Could anyone else do that?

Others could defeat powerful enemies and others could break through an enemy formation, but who could stand in front of those others and take on countless powers all at once?

...Only me, the vice chancellor!

He was second up to bat. His position was shortstop. His role was to reliably see his teammates on their way and reliably hold the enemy back.

There were two tricks to that. The first was to polish his reaction speed and the other was...

...Not to overlook any openings in my opponent.

If he focused on their entire body and watched their actions and formation, he would find the answer.

The density of deflected coins to the front right was thinner. He had intentionally deflected them as such.

So the next time the coins shot toward him from that direction, the barrage would be thinner.

And it was.

So he launched himself forward. He swung his bat to open the way ahead.

“One-man hit and ruuuuun!”

His destination was the merchant ahead of him. The instant he tried to hit him with his bat, the merchant pulled something from both the pots. They were coins just as before, but they were oddly long.

“Ten thousand yen rolls of coins!”

Takakane defended against the rolls of coins that were thrown with a rotation. There were two of them, but if he hit them just off of the center of gravity in the opposite direction of the rotation, they would fall.

Afterwards, he only had to jab in at the merchant while he tried to lower his raised hands.

But...

“!?”

When he tried to suppress the rolls of coins, their paper wrappings burst.

...He'd already unwrapped them!?

The scene before him gave him his answer. The rolls of coins broke in two at the point he had hit them and the coins formed a scatter shot. And they did so further in than his bat.

He swept them, deflected them, and hit them away, but there were too many. Stepping back and hitting with a bunt would work, but...

...I don't have time to fall back!

The time limit for reaching the bridge was close, he had almost reached the merchant in front of him, and his teammates were behind him.

He needed to move forward in this situation.

In that case, he thought while facing forward and looking up in the sky. He knew what airspace this was, so he opened his mouth. With a shout, he held his bat in his left hand and reached his right hand to his back.

“Old Man Velá, it's time to use it! Testamenta Arma: Crus Temperantia!!”

While defending the small ships on the starboard bow, Velázquez answered Takakane's request by activating his Testamenta Arma.

However...

“Hey, are you okay, Takakane? There's a lot of noise coming from the *cadena firma*.

“Don't talk to me right now!!”

That was oppressive but the proper decision for the front line. Also, that idiot was likely drawing as many enemies as he could to let the others move on.

Takakane's unit had passed the halfway point. The effects of Velázquez's Testamenta Arma would eventually stop reaching them, but he could only hope they would take control of the bridge.

Also, the backup sent to Takakane's assault unit came running back along Tama. Once he picked them up, Velázquez would have to begin preparing the small ships to leave. Would the assault unit reach the bridge or would they withdraw?

Now that they had crossed the Tres Españan provisional border, their limit was one minute. After that, the Tres Españan fleet avoiding the Musashi would fire on them.

Most likely, Takakane and the others still needed to travel about two hundred meters in that time. Travelling that distance and boarding the bridge in a single minute would be easy.

But only if the enemy would let them.

“Give it your best shot,” said Velázquez with a sigh.

He listened to the sounds of shellfire and the more distant sounds of gunfire and destruction.

“And I need to protect the backup unit.”

He made paintings to defend against the approaching defense unit's attacks, but he could not simply paint walls. He also needed swamps, trenches, and holes. Recalling how he had painted all those things in the past and turning the entire area into a labyrinth was a lot of fun. He was forbidden from doing so in his work, but here he could do whatever his painting style allowed and that was also a lot of fun.

Hee hee hee. That's a sun wrapping around the battlefield. And I must be a genius to represent clouds like bread. How about I add some sound effects. Giving the pond in the sun a refreshing rumbling sound effect is pretty good taste, isn't it?

...How many years has it been since I've made such bold paintings?

As they were paintings, they were not as meaningful as the real thing. Anything that moved was especially difficult. But despite only painting a two-dimensional representation, he could place them in three-dimensional space by using perspective. The manufacturer of the brush had said something about warping space and whatnot, but he only had to paint. Paintings had developed from religious frescos and Catholicism had plenty of that. It was an excellent religion.

He was satisfied as he painted all those things, but he heard a sudden voice from the small ship behind him.

“Secretary! The transport lift to the right is moving! Something's being carried up from below!”

“It isn't a god of war, is it?”

Musashi's defense units should have all been sent out already. If any hidden troops were coming, he did not understand why they would be attacking the small ships here and so he wondered what this could be.

“This is Musashi's relief team!!”

It was a fat boy pulling a cart.

Velázquez did his best to grasp the situation as the cart with a relief bed was rushed over.

...Oh, this is charity work.

Catholics would often do this. While on the battlefield, some would provide aid to both sides of the battle without taking part in the fight. It was a part of the Tsirhc religion that was spreading around the world.

...So has Musashi started doing that despite being Shinto?

They were likely doing it for appearances which meant it would not be a trap. One wrong move and the records could spread around the world and lower people's estimation of Musashi.

I see, thought Velázquez again as he heard the boy speak while pulling the cart.

“Now, then! People of Tres España! Be moved by my charity and spread the name of Ohiroshiki among the little girls of Tres España! That is only natural, don't you think!? It's the default!”

Velázquez painted a hole and the shouting fell into it.

He sighed, but some others jumped over the hole. One was an Indian boy carrying several plates of curry and the other was a helmed macho man who lifted a food cart and attached it on the back of his waist rather than pulling it behind him.

The two of them arrived at Velázquez.

“Now, it is time for tonight's super curry time.”

“I thought this was charity work!?”

The Indian ignored him and had the macho man lower the food cart and put on an apron.

The large man tucked the apron below the chain across his chest and the Indian faced Velázquez.

“Now, what would you like to eat?”

“How about fried rice?”

“Sure.”

The Indian nodded and walked over to the food cart. The half-naked apron man followed his instructions by placing rice on a plate and pouring curry on top and then the Indian held it out to Velázquez.

“Here is your curry.”

“I asked for fried rice! Give me fried rice!”

The Indian sighed, lowered his shoulders, and returned to the cart. He whispered something in the large man’s ear, shrugged, and shook his head, but overall looked irritated. The half-naked apron man followed his instructions by placing rice on a plate and pouring curry on top. Once more, the Indian held it out to Velázquez.

“Here is your fried rice.”

“That’s curry!!”

“Oh?”

The Indian nodded, walked back to the cart, and finally returned.

“Here is your fried rice.”

“That’s clearly curry and you didn’t even swap it out this time!!”

Velázquez swept a hand at the Indian for a tsukkomi, but he accidentally knocked the plate from his hands.

“Ah,” said the Indian while the plate fell to the deck in horribly slow motion.

With a wet sound, the curry and rice splattered and spread across the deck.

The Indian got down on hands and knees and hung his head toward the curry.

“How could this happen to the great curry?”

Velázquez instinctually added the vertical lines to represent shock, but he noticed the whispering of his fellow Tres Españas from the small ship behind him.

“Hey, isn’t the secretary in trouble here?”

“Yeah, he’s being pretty immature. I mean, isn’t curry fine?”

Oh, no, thought Velázquez. If this is charity work, the records will show how I treated them.

In order to make up for that, he reached out with the brush still in hand.

“Um, well, if you insist.”

“Of course!”

The Indian instantly recovered. He stood up, held up the original plate he was hiding behind him, and tried to hold it out.

“Ah.”

Velázquez’s brush plunged deep into the curry.

The odd and unfamiliar sound of something smooth sliding out of place came from the tip of the brush.

This was nothing more than the large brush being thrust into the plate of curry, but Velázquez had a certain thought.

...I've made countless paintings, but I've never seen a theme or still-life like this!

The title would certainly either be Curry and Brush or A Combination of Two Favorites, but no one would be able to imagine the actual scene from those titles.

But the two individuals eventually grasped the truth before them.

“Ahhhh!”

Velázquez managed to speak first.

“Y-you idiot! What are you going to do about this!?”

He pointed at the tip of the brush that was surrounded by carrots and the like.

“Hurry up and wash it! Do you have any turpentine? Then bring it over here! Lamp oil works too! If you're doing charity work, surely you have something like that!”

“Understood.”

The Indian walked to the food cart, returned, and held something toward Velázquez.

“Here is your curry.”

“That's not even close!”

“But turpentine is an oil and curry has oil in it, so they are the same. After all, this is beef curry.”

“Can you really serve beef when you're Indian!? Aren't you Dunhi!?”

“I am Shinto.”

“Then you shouldn't be worshiping curry!!”

“Curry is the food of the gods, so it is the world standard.”

“Wait,” said Velázquez while he thought.

During the Renaissance and Baroque periods, Europe had made many works of art based on Greek mythology and the Testament. However...

“Was the angel carrying a plate of curry during the Annunciation!? Did they serve curry at the Last Supper!?”

“They must have forgotten to paint it in.” The boy sounded absolutely certain. “How could they not serve curry at the Last Supper? Which is more satisfying, eating steak before dying or eating curry before dying?”

“Now you’re just trying to talk your way out of it!”

At that point, Velázquez noticed a change. He had swung his brush a few times during the conversation, but there was a common factor to what it painted.

“Curry.”

It seemed the material used to paint was automatically sent out because the lakes, river, and sky he had painted were now made of curry. Hassan turned to him to explain.

“This is a work of the gods.”

“Everything stinks of curry now, you idiot! And why is it even painting!? This is a spell!”

“Because curry is the food of the gods. I added in ether to reproduce that fact. In other words, it is magic curry.”

“Drugs!? You put drugs in it, didn’t you!? Or is it some kind of dangerous spell!?”

“It is all to satisfy the customers who spent their hard-earned money.”

“Don’t sell the food of the gods!!”

Meanwhile, the small ship behind him began to shake as the engine started up.

“Secretary! We’re just about at the limit!”

“Is everyone aboard!?”

“Testament!”

Velázquez nodded and sighed at that answer and he spoke to the Indian and the half-naked apron man.

“Pack it up in an insulated container. However this ends, we’re going home with some hungry people. A lot of them are athletes, so can you add in some salt?”

He then opened a *cadena firma* to speak to Takakane while watching Michiyuki Byakko create a wheat field and path in the sky overhead.

“Hey, Takakane. If you haven’t noticed, it’s about time for the last spurt.”

Takakane nodded.

He had already swung the Testamenta Arma he had drawn from his back to replace the long bat.

“Testament Arma: Crus Temperantia – Vetus.”

Velázquez had already activated Novum which had divided the enemy’s ability by the number of uses.

Takakane’s Vetus doubled the enemy’s time.

“...!!”

Tama, the Musashi’s second starboard ship, had become an unfavorable area for Musashi.

He then made his move to fulfill his role as vice chancellor. He charged toward the merchant who was slowed by 1/2.

“Hooooomerun!!”

And he hit the merchant’s body toward the opposite field.

The baseball player got a clean hit on the merchant.

The hit had everything needed for a homerun, but the merchant was slowed down by 1/2. Takakane watched the merchant’s face as the boy was slowly knocked away.

He was smiling.

Takakane wondered why, but he realized the answer due to the sensation arriving through the Testamenta Arma in his hand.

“You had money prepared!?”

Below the merchant’s torn clothing, he saw ring mail made of five yen coins covering his upper body. The defending coins had bent, but they had definitely dispersed and counteracted some of the damage to the merchant.

And the merchant spoke while being knocked away.

“You lose.”

Like hell I do, thought Takakane. If I get in just one more hit, you lose.

However, as the merchant crashed into a nearby house’s door, he spoke.

“You...”

He bounced off yet continued.

“You have lost to Musashi!”

“Nonsense,” said Takakane as he ran over and swung up the bat to strike again.
“Victory is...”

He did not say “mine”.

...*Ours!*

As soon as he shouted that in his heart, the light from above vanished.

“...!?”

A white transport ship had appeared overhead with the emblems for Musashi Ariadust Academy and Marube-ya.

One of its bottom hatches opened. The hatch was meant to release the contents of large wooden containers, but this time, it did not release food, water, trade goods, or even the wooden or paper boxes meant to hold them.

“That’s...”

Money.

Coins that had filled a large wooden container fell in a quantity that not even “countless” quite covered.

“!?”

The transport ship tilted and a cascade of coins seemed to explode from the hatch. They fell with enough density to cover up the sky.

Takakane heard the heavy scraping of metal that sounded like a swarm of crying insects.

“Do not worry. This is a portion of the eight billion yen earned in the last few days in England. I had it exchanged for yen when seeing them off.”

“Damn you!”

Even as they spoke, the waterfall fell.

“...!!”

Nevertheless, Takakane made use of his defensive ability below the surging wave of coins.

As he moved, rotated, and deflected, none of the coins touched him. By deflecting a coin into other coins, he created defensive chain reactions with each individual deflection.

However, Takakane realized something about the cascade of coins as he did so.

“This isn’t an attack! It’s meant to hold me here!!”

He was deflecting the many coins using the Testament Arma that’s power reduced their speed and strength.

...But that means it takes twice as long for the coins to fall!

He would be stuck here for twice as long as normal.

He saw the merchant slowly stand up. While Takakane was stuck where he was, the merchant moved slowly but surely past him and forward to the Musashi defense unit defending the bridge.

“Hey, Takakane!”

Takakane heard Velázquez speak but had no time to respond.

“Deactivate yours!”

He did not need to be told. After all, he was not stopping even a single enemy at the moment and they were already out of time. So he replied with his actions.

“...!!”

Knowing he would be hit, he placed the Testamenta Arma on his back.

In that instant, the cascade of money exploded inward as if striking him from the side.

Takakane ran from the waterfall of money as if crossing a mountain of coins.

He threw away his cracked helmet afterwards.

“Hurry onward!!”

He ran as if throwing his entire body forward.

He ran directly toward Tama’s bridge.

He was only a few hundred meters away and the enemy defense unit formed a wall along the way.

The merchant was running to move out from between the two sides.

“Charge forward!!”

The money-lover’s shout sent the enemy unit dashing forward with shoulders and shields thrust forward. And they were positioned to tear into the Tres Españan side from below.

Their Shinto shields used purification to reduce attack power, so any attack that hit them would lose their power and might be repelled. Once an attack clung to the shield, it would lose all strength and fall.

But that reduction of power only applied to attacks.

As Tres España’s vice chancellor, Takakane primarily fought through defense, but...

“Outta the way!!”

He hit back with a pendulum-like batting style that incorporated a running start and instantly knocked around a dozen defenders into the air.

He broke through, but his run had lost a bit of speed with that attack.

In that instant, a shower of metallic noises raced toward him as if to envelop his back.

...Is this that the money waterfall!?

That was precisely what raced toward him as a thick barrage. He had previously knocked away the cascade of money, but power had been reinstalled in the coins and it had hopped up from the deck to attack him from behind.

He turned his back on it, swung his bat, and tried to regain his forward momentum.

“Tch.”

With a click of the tongue, he tried to raise his bat for defense with a single thought in his mind.

...Is this the end!?

He had no time. If he turned around here, his speed would drop and he would use up some of the time needed to take the bridge.

...But my role is...

He thought the word “defense” just as a fierce sound of impact exploded behind him.

But it was not the sound of the coins reaching him.

It was the sound of those very coins hitting the teammates following him.

“You guys!?”

Takakane continued facing forward, but he saw those knocked away by the initial impact fly past him in the air. They were more slammed into the deck then sent rolling across it, but...

“Captain! Continue on!”

He heard more cheers and sounds of impacts behind him and he heard his teammates jumping in between him and the reverse cascade of money.

By literally offering him their backs and shoulders, they allowed him to focus on moving forward.

And amid the dull sounds of defense and the clinking of coins, a few people lined up alongside Takakane. There were seven of them and that number meant one thing.

“Is this all the starting members other than Valdés!?”

“Testament!!”

The voices of those blocking the flowing tsunami of money reached him from behind. They shook as they were hit and cut out here and there, but what they said was clear.

“Heeeenaaaareeees!!”

“Testament!” replied the low, sharp voices of Takakane and the other seven who ran with him.

Forward.

Takakane continue forward with his teammates. He felt the presence of those left behind as he continued on.

They were now less than one hundred meters away, so they move onwards while the enemy sent attacks of rejection.

At eight-five meters away, a Techonhexen unit attack from above on either side.

The right fielder and left fielder dove and stopped the attacks.

At sixty-three meters away, a volley of arrows arrived from straight ahead.

The center fielder opened a path.

At fifty-seven meters away, the merchant fired coin bullets at an opening.

The second baseman leaped in from the side to take care of them and the first baseman took care of what had been deflected.

At forty-one meters away, one of Musashi's defense units arrived from a side passageway to the right.

The third baseman stopped them despite being thrown along the ground and having his hat knocked from his head.

At thirty meters away, Takakane realized he would only have the catcher left.

However, the catcher was gone.

Instead, he heard an intense sound of money behind him and the body that stopped it.

Takakane faced forward.

Tama's bridge looked like a black wall in the moonlight and he was 27.431 meters to the entrance.

It was a straight line and only one back stood between him and the hatch that formed that entrance.

It was the merchant who ran toward that hatch.

His speed had dropped due to the coins he had fired earlier, so Takakane caught up with twenty-one meters to go.

The merchant leaped and turned toward him in midair.

Bullets flew toward him.

He deflected all of them with twenty meters left and at nineteen meters...

“...!”

He swung his bat as if knocking something into the air. It was a perfect hit. A sound came from the merchant's ribs and he flew far into the air ahead. He flew approximately eighteen meters.

But Takakane was not going to let him off that easily. He ran toward where the merchant would land and prepared to swing again to hit the falling boy into the hatch.

But in that instant, he heard the merchant speak even as the boy flew through the air and felt great pain.

“I will pay you for your trouble, Hound of England and Silver Wolf of Musashi!”

Those two people then arrived from the moonlit sky.

Hundreds of blades fell in front of Takakane and rushed toward him like the wind.

“Walsingham!? So England has finally sent reinforcements!?”

“Bites!”

Takakane completely deflected the blades and destroyed the blast from the cross spear.

He continued his batting defense as he ran and he caught Walsingham herself.

“Outta the way!”

At sixteen meters from the bridge, he knocked the hound aside, but...

“Take this!”

The silver wolf’s voice came from overhead along with four large wooden containers and the chains that had thrown them. However, Takakane did not slow down. He straightened up to let his teammates see the school emblem on his back and then he leaned forward.

“Don’t underestimate the vice chancellor!”

Without slowing, he knocked the containers to the deck and air on either side.

The four chains were launching twisting strikes, but he matched the rotational direction of their tight arms.

“...!”

He knocked them all to the ground in an instant and stepped over their arms to open a path using the silver wolf’s attack.

In that instant, the wolf lowered herself down.

It was a sudden action, but he could still land a hit. He had trained enough for that.

But when he checked the remaining thirteen meters, he saw the merchant with his hips lowered and blood leaking from his mouth.

“This is my final coin!”

This was not a mere throw or scattering.

He used both hands to open a massive number of sign frames from in front to behind him. These were the contracts that sent one-tenth of the signer's power.

“Take this!!”

As soon as he placed a coin in the farthest back sign frame, it accelerated.

This was an acceleration cannon using the thousand or so sign frames. Even if each one was only one-tenth of one person's power, the same thing was repeated over a thousand times to instantly fire the coin. Just as the air burst and a steam explosion came from the muzzle, Takakane realized the coin had been fired toward his chest.

His teammates were behind him, so he could not dodge it.

“...!”

So he swung to intercept the high-speed coin bullet with the dead center of the bat.

A great roar burst out and the air let out a cry from the great impact.

“...Ah!”

The bat did indeed strike the coin bullet, but it changed shape like clay and then shattered.

The sound of destruction produced splinters and only the grip remained in Takakane's hands.

He had lost his weapon, he was out of breath, and only empty space remained on the battlefield, but...

“Kh!”

He moved forward. He had no feet, but he accelerated in his attempt to move ever onward.

“_____!!”

An alarm filled the air.

The small ships on the front of Tama and the distant Tres Españan fleet were giving off a long alarm.

That indicated their time was up and the merchant shouted out what that meant as he fell to his knees and spat out blood.

“Game over, baseball player!!”

Takakane had heard it. It was over. He understood that. But...

“...!”

He moved forward. He had lost his momentum and his main weapon had been destroyed, but he produced a roar from his throat and did indeed move forward.

“I can’t give up on this game!!”

He was twelve meters away.

He had already heard the signal and words that indicated the ending, but Takakane continued forward.

“...!!”

He drew the Testamenta Arma from his back despite not yet being able to activate it again and he tried to cover that last distance.

At the same time, an enemy defense unit jumped in between him and the bridge at just over the ten meter mark. The silver wolf with her chains and the hound with her countless blades also circled around ahead of him.

“Intercept him!!”

They all prepared their weapons at the wolf’s words, but Takakane continued regardless.

...Of course I’m not stopping!

He recalled what he had thought while playing catch with Fusae earlier and what their chancellor had shown them during the early stages of the naval battle.

Fusae had said things were fine as they were.

Their chancellor had taken action to stop Tres España’s decline as much as possible.

What am I? he asked himself. *Nothing would remain here if I withdrew just because the time limit arrived.*

If nothing of his actions during the armada battle remained, it was the same as not fighting against their decline in the slightest. Things would be unable to continue “as they were” and the chancellor’s thoughts would be for nothing.

Takakane wanted to leave something behind.

He wanted to accomplish something definite beyond forming bonds with his teammates and making fulfilling memories.

He had known the armada battle would happen, so...

“What do you think the vice chancellor is for!?”

With that shout, Takakane stretched his hand forward while running.

He reached out for the destination beyond the line of enemies.

When the enemy vanguard moved forward, he deflected and evaded them, but his hurry prevented him from fully avoiding the strikes.

A few hit him and a spray of ether rose from his spirit body.

He felt pain and heard the sound of his body being literally worn away.

But...

“...!!”

He swept the enemies to either side as if looking back and he indeed moved forward.

But as he swung the Testamenta Arma in place of a bat and ran through, his defenses opened for an instant.

The hound's cross cannon took that moment to fire from beyond the barrier formed by the silver wolf's chains.

He saw the wolf biting her bottom lip and waving her right hand toward his charge.

The blast arrived on a collision course, but Takakane still reached his hand forward.

“Dammit!!”

As the destructive light flew toward him, he opened his throat wide and cried out.

“This isn't the end! This isn't the end for Tres España!!”

The blast was going to strike as he shouted those words, but just before it did, a few movements obstructed his movements.

“Captain!!”

A dozen or so arms and bodies grabbed him from behind and threw him.

These were the main members of Tres España's baseball team. They had caught up to him.

“!?”

And the instant after he escaped the blast, Takakane saw the night sky.

He had flown over Tama's starboard edge and into that sky.

Takakane understood that his teammates had saved him.

He could see those teammates falling through the empty space around him and entering their proper falling positions.

The wind blew upwards where the Musashi quickly flew westward.

They all looked up at the Musashi, but a few of them were still holding Takakane's back and shoulders. Their strength seemed to be restricting him from going back there.

As he looked up at the bottom of the Musashi, he could feel his fall accelerating.

And while falling in a straight line, he heard the voices of the comrades still holding him here.

“Captain!” they all shouted. “The game is over!”

He heard them all breathe and wait for him to respond.

During that pause, he gave himself over to the wind of his fall and looked up at the sky. The Musashi had already grown distant in the western sky and he passed back-first through the wind after being left behind.

“Dammit.”

He slowly relaxed his body and instead opened his mouth and hung his head.

“Dammiiiiit!!”

The wind sped up as it carried his voice away. That wind now contained the sounds of cannons and impacts.

The Musashi had filled a large portion of the distance to Tres España.

While Takakane fell, there were two movements on Tama.

They were the pursuit and mopping up of the Tres España students still on the ship. The pursued vermilion uniforms threw themselves into the air and were picked up by the Velázquez or Valdés ships, but some took action too late.

However, someone saved them by drawing everyone’s attention into the sky.

“Taka!”

A voice and a giant white form descended from the sky.

It was Tres España’s 2nd Special Duty Officer Era Fusae and her god of war Michiyuki Byakko. The god of war created and ran across a wheat field and path which now formed a vertical downward slope.

The Byakko raced down faster than if it simply fell.

However, the Musashi had a method of intercepting the vertically descending Byakko.

“Contact!!”

The color vermilion flew into the air from the rear of Tama.

Jizuri Suzaku was launched directly toward Michiyuki Byakko.

Chapter 66: Seeing One Off to the Heavens and the Earth

CHAPTER 66

"Seeing One Off to the Heavens and the Earth"



It is a feeling
That is created at a single point in the past
Point Allocation (Proof of Equality)

It is a feeling

That is created at a single point in the past

Point Allocation (Proof of Equality)

Fusae saw a trail of fog rising from directly below her.

She understood what was making its way up to her.

It was the god of war named Jizuri Suzaku.

She had assumed it was one of the Four Sacred Beast gods of war just like Michiyuki Byakko, but each Sacred Beast had one of the Mountain-River-Path-Swamp powers and it had been unable to activate the swamp ability that the Suzaku would possess. Thus, this was merely a copy of the Suzaku god of war.

That meant Fusae had no interest in it and so she gave her instructions to Michiyuki Byakko. The OS's movement control spell program began midair combat and she gave additional instructions.

“Buffer our fall speed and don't hold back.”

More OS *cadena firma* appeared and the Byakko's shoulders both opened in the downward direction. The cannons modelled after a tiger face appeared there.

“Ultra Vibration Destruction Cannon: Roar Deterioration.”

It fired its greatest power to intercept the mass of metal flying up from below.

Directly below, the night air shook at close range as the enemy jumped into that space.

“...!”

The enemy more shattered than broke.

But Fusae saw what broke first on the rising mass of metal.

...The god of war buffering equipment!?

She had previously seen this during the Battle of Mikawa. When Jizuri Suzaku had been fired into the air, its legs, body, and arms had had large buffering structures attached. She understood that intellectually, but what she saw was different.

...It's backwards!?

Jizuri Suzaku had flown up while upside down.

Fusae thought about what that meant.

...If its legs were pointed upwards...

Just before the ultra vibration enveloped the leg buffering, it would kick off of it to move to the side.

The god of war was heavy, but if any of its upward momentum remained, it could continue up into the heavens. If its legs were pointed up, its arms would be down and it could grab the Byakko's back while passing by.

In that case, it would pass by on the left or the right and Fusae made an instantaneous decision.

...Right!

The instant she saw the color red to the right, she had Michiyuki Byakko's right claws race through the air.

It hit, it grabbed, and it tore.

And so Fusae assumed it had worked.

However, the expected shock and recoil did not reach Michiyuki Byakko's right shoulder.

The red of the Suzaku had suddenly taken evasive action in midair.

...*Eh?*

Jizuri Suzaku was meant for work on the ground and the Testament Union's almanac information and the information from intelligence agents in England was enough to know that Musashi had no aerial gods of war.

So how had it taken evasive action in midair? When Fusae hurriedly turned to the right to answer that question, she saw three crosses in the moonlight.

Two were god of war flight devices and the third was the vermilion god of war with its arms extended to either side.

Fusae recognized those flight devices because they were used for Tres España's gods of war.

“Those are the wings of the god of war the Technohexen shot down during the Battle of Mikawa!”

The Suzaku's cross wings warped the air behind it and the vermilion triple cross charged straight toward Fusae while she heard the enemy shout. The false arm girl named Naomasa's words were hard to interpret as actual instructions.

“Hit her, Jizuri Suzaku!!”

Everyone from the engine division watched as the gods of war collided overhead.

Among them, Hiro, the girl in charge of Jizuri Suzaku, was asked a question by her grandfather.

“Installing them is good and all, but isn't that forcing things to work?”

“She wouldn’t shut up about making it fly. I had the wings running for three days and nights straight to get the proof that it would work, so my ears are still ringing. Of course, I did say I would make any modification she wanted as long as she gave me the right to maintain it from now on.”

“So you were the one making all that noise below the inspection area. I was wondering why no one stopped by to tell me to scold whoever it was.”

“Oh, sorry. Was it that loud?”

“If it was necessary, then it’s fine. Then again, it would be even better had it not been necessary.”

Hiro crossed her arms and nodded at her grandfather’s words.

“Well, Jizuri Suzaku had a light frame to begin with, so I didn’t set the output too high. That means it really comes down to the first attack, but she said that’s fine because she just has to keep that Byakko away from the bridge. But...”

The granddaughter pointed up at the color vermilion flying in the sky.

“How much does everyone know about that Suzaku?”

“All of us know. As does everyone in Naomasa’s class...including that chancellor.”

“I see,” said Hiro. “But wouldn’t it be bad to let that be destroyed?”

“Even so, she has no choice but to do this. She decided that was how she would continue on with the others. So...”

Taizou looked up in the sky with everyone else.

“You cheer her on too.”

With that, an especially loud sound of impact came from the night sky.

The vermilion god of war tackled the white one.

It hit the right side from the right, but while the Suzaku used its raised left knee, Michiyuki Byakko attempted to counterattack with its claws in a right backhand.

Jizuri Suzaku used the wings on its waist to bend backwards in midair and slip below the Byakko's swinging right arms.

“Grab it with your legs, Jizuri Suzaku!”

Rather than the side, Jizuri Suzaku's legs wrapped around the Byakko's upper arm.

One leg had not been enough to fully suppress its left arm before, so it used both legs this time.

“Go around!!”

An instant later, Jizuri Suzaku rotated around the Byakko's back like a pendulum attached to the point it had grabbed.

After rotating and extending its arms, it wrapped those arms around the Byakko's left arm from behind.

Now both of Michiyuki Byakko's arms had been secured from behind using both arms and legs.

The Suzaku was stretched across the Byakko's back as if lying down on top of its wings.

“Pull it tight!!”

Jizuri Suzaku bent its body with smoke rising from the wire cylinders that acted as its abdominal muscles. Its back bent like a bow and it pulled its entire body toward the sky.

With a mechanical cry, Michiyuki Byakko's arms were pulled up from behind like chicken wings.

The movements of its shoulders showed it was attempting to resist, but there was little it could do in this state.

Jizuri Suzaku focused its entire body into holding those two arms in place, but...

“_____!!”

The Suzaku's body shook.

A burden was being placed on it. Michiyuki Byakko made several rapid attempts to tear it away and created a gap in Jizuri Suzaku's restraint. The Suzaku attempted to tighten down, but that slight gap and difference in angle caused it to shift and it attempted to fight it using pure strength.

“...!”

But shimmering heat began to rise from its body.

Due to the difference in output between the two machines, the Suzaku's motors quickly reached their limits.

And so Naomasa gave a new instruction to the wings rather than the motors.

“Slam it down, Jizuri Suzaku!”

Jizuri Suzaku obeyed by flapping its wings, but it did not use them to fly. It moved itself backwards to help lift the Byakko's arms.

Air exploded forward and all of Jizuri Suzaku's strength and its wings' strength both pulled Michiyuki Byakko's arms toward the heavens.

And finally, Byakko's arms were pulled completely toward the sky and its body rotated as if falling into the air.

...Got it!

Naomasa knew her technique had worked.

Before, she had chosen to use Jizuri Suzaku to clash with this god of war and that had led to her loss.

If exchanging blows would not work, her only choice was to use throws and locking techniques.

However, this opponent was definitely quite skilled.

...I'm lucky I had Mito to practice with.

She had gained a partner because Mitotsudaira had come to fall victim to...no, to learn her martial arts. Specifically, how to throw someone by twisting a grabbed arm.

Mitotsudaira had used her flat hand rather than her nails, but Naomasa had still taken a lot of attacks. She had spun and grabbed a lot in return, but she felt the yakiniku meant as thanks was not quite enough. The venison had had a strong taste, Mitotsudaira had not ordered any vegetables, the only alcohol had been wine, and they had been in the non-smoking section.

Also, the only answer Naomasa had found was the simple fact that she had to attack at an opening if she wanted to be certain.

That was why she surprised her opponent with her ability to and then attacked from the side.

She had grabbed and locked the other god of war and now she was falling through the air.

...Time to slam it into something head-first!

If she did that, she would win. She did not know what would happen afterwards, but the enemy would have been completely diverted from the bridge. That would prevent them from destroying Tama's bridge before the Musashi reached the Tres Españan fleet.

And so she gave into the fall and flapped her wings again.

...*I will win!*

But as soon as she thought that, the enemy came into view.

It was Era Fusae.

She stood on Michiyuki Byakko's shoulder and she faced Naomasa in the night.

Her eyebrows were slightly raised as their gazes clashed with such force it almost seemed audible.

A moment later, countless *cadena firma* from Michiyuki Byakko's OS appeared around her.

"Michiyuki Byakko, envelop her."

"What?"

Naomasa did not understand and she saw white light produced by Michiyuki Byakko's OS. The *cadena firma* were appearing around Jizuri Suzaku rather than Michiyuki Byakko.

...*Is she trying to sync us with Byakko's OS!?*

She did not initially understand why Fusae would try to do that, but then it hit her.

Their falling direction had changed. The Suzaku's back was now at the bottom of the fall rather than the Byakko's head.

"What is this?"

Above Michiyuki Byakko's shoulders and to the left of Jizuri Suzaku as it bent like a bow to hold those shoulders in place, ether light suddenly formed a wheat field and a path.

...!?

Instead of falling down, they were falling to the field Byakko had created in midair and the change in direction meant they would fall on the Suzaku's back instead of the Byakko's head. If they continued to fall, Jizuri Suzaku would be crushed underneath the other machine.

“!!”

And they hit.

Fusae saw the destruction of Jizuri Suzaku's left shoulder, left arm, and left waist down to the base.

The destruction was caused by the machine's own weight as well as Michiyuki Byakko's weight.

The Byakko's arms were raised, but it had hit the ground such that the angle between neck and arm was widened. And if the triangle between arm and neck was brought down to a line, the Suzaku inside the triangle would be crushed.

That was why Fusae would do exactly that.

Afterwards, she only needed to stand the Byakko up from its face up position and run to Tama's bridge on the path it created.

However...

“Jizuri Suzaku!!”

The Suzaku was unable to eliminate the vibration of the impact against the virtual ground behind it, but it still stood up. It forcibly jumped over the Byakko's head in order to wrap its arms around and cling to that head.

Well done, thought Fusae.

The enemy planned to perform a lock on Michiyuki Byakko's head in an attempt to rob it of the autonomous decision-making ability that required information from the sensory devices.

But as the Suzaku circled around above, Fusae performed an overhand swing with the Byakko's right claws.

She targeted its torso and hit the chest. The claws pierced the armor clothing on the left side, tore through the joints and wire cylinders in the chest, and slammed the vermilion Suzaku into the virtual ground.

The Suzaku audibly crashed into that virtual ground.

As it lay sprawled out on its back, the damage from the claw strike left its internal structure and core visible.

Shimmering heat and steam were released as a pulsating machine was revealed.

“———!”

The Suzaku shook with what sounded like a scream and white steam burst from the primary motor as the outside air came into contact with it.

A normal god of war would have a transparent ether cylinder that held the pilot, but the externally controlled type they were using was different.

...That should be the primary nerve device that controls the full body!

Breaking that would stop the god of war. However...

“Eh?”

Fusae let out a questioning tone. The object under the moonlight was not a metal cowl surrounding the artificial nerves that supported the spinal cord.

...Why is there an ether cylinder for a pilot!?

A transparent cylinder made of thick anti-explosive glass was within arm's reach in front of Fusae. It was filled with bluish-white Orei Nero and a long, narrow torii-style sign frame was visible within.

The sign frame displayed a human form. Normally, it would display the pilot, but this was not a man or woman who was trained as a pilot. It was a very young girl. Also...

“...!?”

The person in that flat bluish-white image only had a head, an upper body, and a scattering of other parts.

This isn't right, thought Fusae.

When a pilot boarded a god of war and lost parts of their body, the lost parts would be displayed in a different color or some other kind of explanation would be provided.

However, this sign frame had nothing of the sort.

...Then was this girl put inside here for some reason while already injured like that!?

Small sign frames danced around her. They displayed a bird and contained the word “Suzaku”, but the injured girl in the long torii slept in the center of them all.

“That’s my younger sister.”

A girl with one false arm stood on the Suzaku’s shoulder with blood staining half her face.

“When our village was attacked, Jizuri Suzaku wouldn’t function. And just when everything looked hopeless, she spoke to me. She was barely even breathing anymore, but she told me to use her.”

So...

“So I will use her.”

“...!!”

Fusae moved on reflex. She did not understand what was about to happen, but a thought of rejection told her to finish this opponent. She had decided to attack and prevent this girl from “using” her sister.

But...

“Jizuri Suzaku! Get up!”

She knew what that meant. The Suzaku would force itself to stand up and interfere with Fusae’s actions.

But...

...Stop!

She tried to understand what was happening before her eyes, but she could not. It was like trying to lock up something that could not control itself.

“Stop it! Michiyuki Byakko!!”

The Byakko responded. While the Suzaku rotated its wings and tried to flap them to stand up, the Byakko opened both its shoulders and fired the ultra vibration destruction cannons there.

“_____”

But Fusae realized something. The ultra vibration did not produce any sounds of destruction or vermilion fragments. The Suzaku simply remained lying where it had been and something new had appeared on the edge of the ground behind it.

“Water?”

A background made of ether had appeared below Jizuri Suzaku’s back.

It was a marsh.

Jizuri Suzaku had somehow not been destroyed and an ether marsh had appeared below its back. After seeing that, Fusae realized some new light had appeared around her.

It began with the OS sign frames glowing on the surface of the ether cylinder exposed in Jizuri Suzaku's chest.

The image of a girl slowly opened her mouth without opening her eyes.

“_____”

At the same time, the Suzaku gave an extremely high-pitched and creaking cry.

As if in response to that sound, countless vermilion sign frames appeared across Jizuri Suzaku and around Naomasa. And they all said the same thing.

“Four Sacred Beasts God of War Type 3 – Jizuri Suzaku : Initial Activation Check : Beginning Initial Activation”

It was booting up and using the default settings of an initial activation.

Fusae gave a large gulp.

She had assumed this enemy was not using one of the Four Sacred Beasts gods of war, but she had been wrong.

...What if one of the Four Sacred Beasts OSs had never been fully booted up before?

It was unthinkable. After all, gods of war were supplied as finished products. They were shipped out once the OS and everything else had been fully activated to test them. It was unthinkable for a god of war that had been active for so long to have never fully booted up its OS.

However...

...What if most of the OS's artificial brain was lost during its initial activation and a dying girl was taken in its place?

And...

...What if the girl's mind completed the damaged OS and fused with it?

The god of war had been active all this time by prioritizing that girl who had asked to be used. Most likely, the basic autonomous movement system had used the unconscious girl's senses and had her reply to her sister's instructions via actions.

That had been the girl's will.

But when the girl who was also the OS had been in danger, it had acted in self-preservation.

“Are you saying the Suzaku is taking action to protect her!?”

The trigger had likely been when Michiyuki Byakko's OS had attempted to sync with its OS.

The Suzaku's OS had activated to combat the danger of the synching OS attempting to activate.

That was what had happened.

And now a marsh was spreading out before Fusae. It had been created from her path. Michiyuki Byakko was opening several locking *cadena firma* to prevent its path from being consumed, but it was no use. The Byakko had been the one to begin the sync, so the synching OS running within it was now eating into the barriers from the inside.

And if Jizuri Suzaku's power was the swamp of Mountain-River-Path-Swamp...

...Is this water!? No, this is...

“The sky!?”

The marsh reflected the sky, but it was a blue sky that did not exist here.

Fusae then understood why Jizuri Suzaku had not been destroyed. If the marsh behind it was the sky...

“You ‘fell back’ within that infinite sky, didn’t you!?”

It was similar to the paradox of Achilles and the tortoise. That thin marsh was an infinitely-thick sky.

The water’s surface was a flat surface, but Jizuri Suzaku’s wings had definitely opened within it.

At the same time, Michiyuki Byakko shook.

It fell.

The Suzaku and Byakko’s positions and heights had not changed on the flat surface of the marsh that had appeared in midair, but it still fell. After all, that flat surface contained a sky with infinite thickness.

Anything that stood on it would fall, but Jizuri Suzaku had wings and it raised those two crosses.

“...!!”

And it flipped them both around.

Michiyuki Byakko fell at only about thirty meters above Tama, but the marsh meant it was essentially falling from extremely high altitude. On its way down, it slammed into the side of the deck.

It hit a corner with a straight vertical body slam that shattered the edge of the deck.

When it struck, the sound of breaking metal filled the air. The Byakko's right forearm broke and the right thigh shifted out of place and broke so that the base of the leg would not move. The primary armor on the chest shattered in an instant and the motors below were exposed.

As if ignoring the secondary sounds of the scattering fragments, the Byakko bounced back up from the great impact.

“_____”

And it limply slid off the ship and fell into the space between the sea and sky.

As it fell, a woman with disheveled hair stood on its white shoulder.

“...!”

Fusae shouted something, but it was drowned out by the wind. But as she looked up, she saw the twin moons overhead.

In front of those moons floated two crosses and a god of war that almost appeared to be hanging from them.

The Suzaku slowly descended from the sky, but there was no strength in it. The OS had deactivated and it was descending under the bare minimum of autonomous actions.

Fusae looked away and saw something down below. It was the small ship that had collected Takakane and the others who had withdrawn.

But even as she breathed a sigh of relief, she realized someone was missing.

“Is Gin still fighting on the Musashi!?”

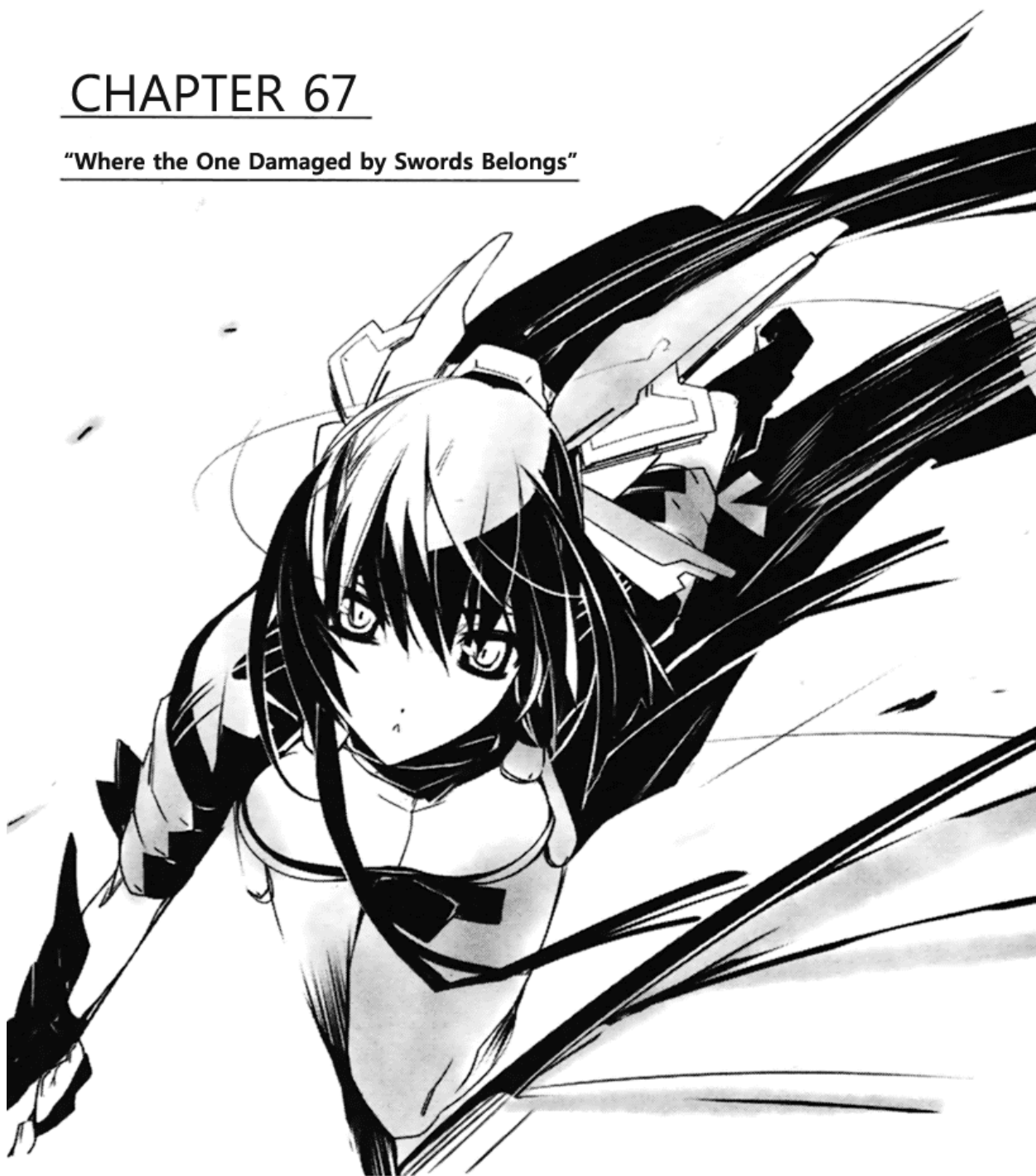
The sound of cannon fire on the Musashi seemed to answer her question.

Tachibana Gin continued to fight despite losing her chance to withdraw.

Chapter 67: Where the One Damaged by Swords Belongs

CHAPTER 67

"Where the One Damaged by Swords Belongs"



Why am I
So very desperate?

Point Allocation (Same as Always)

Why am I

So very desperate?

Point Allocation (Same as Always)

The sound of cannon fire flew along a street in the moonlit city.

There were two streams of cannon fire which were being used by a girl swinging around cross swords with her two false arms.

She was Tachibana Gin and she ran through the business district on the rear port end of Tama.

“...!”

Her opponent was Honda Futayo who ran while wielding the divine weapon and spear named Tonbokiri.

While using both guns and swords, Gin realized two sounds had vanished: the sounds of fighting on the starboard side and the roars of Fusae's Michiyuki Byakko.

She understood what that meant and that the blaring sirens indicated the time limit.

The time to withdraw had passed and the Musashi would now receive shellfire from Tres España's main fleet.

She could no longer leave the ship and seek rescue, but...

...I am prepared for that!

Gin had made up her mind.

She knew she was completely disobeying her orders, but this was necessary for her greatest objective.

...I will defeat Honda Futayo and return Master Muneshige's inherited name to him!

She repeatedly attacked and defended within the wind.

As they exchanged attacks, she had a single thought about Futayo's fighting style.

...She is an idiot with a completely defensive style of offense!

As Gin attacked head on, the other girl charged almost directly into the attacks.

It was pointless to ask if she was not afraid. She had achieved an ideal possessed by anyone who had reached a certain level. It was the simple idea to "move forward before the attack hits", but it was extremely difficult to put to practice.

...Yet she is easily charging ahead of the shells!

It was less that she was confident she could evade and more that she was not concerned by Gin's attacks.

Gin understood why. She was not letting the appearance of the attacks deceive her and she was dealing with them according to their classification.

...When looking at them head on, all attacks fall into three basic categories: piercing attacks or cannons are points, slashes are lines, and area spells are planes.

Gin's father had taught her that. Even throws and grappling were points or lines before one was grabbed. According to her father, once one understood that everything fell under those two categories plus the planes created by spells, the rest was easy.

Points were fast, but one only had to shift the area that would be hit and move forward.

Lines were long, but one only had to duck under that path and move forward.

Planes were wide, but one only had to circle around outside their range and move forward.

The rest was an issue of size and speed, but there were only ever three things to do.

Thinking of it that way, shellfire and spear jabs were nothing but points. If one did not fear the sound of firing and took the shockwave into account, any of those attacks could be avoided. And...

“...!”

Futayo arrived in a lowered posture by accelerating as if stretching forward.

Gin had a certain thought about that offensive girl.

...She is worth fighting!

While the two of them exchanged attacks, Futayo rethought her opinion of Gin.

When they had crossed blades during the previous attack, she had thought Gin was a girl who simply came in to attack, but now...

...She is an idiot with a completely offensive style of defense!

There was a single reason for that.

While Futayo attacked, Gin defended with interception fire, but she still evaded and attacked from every possible position and angle.

If Futayo did not keep moving, Gin would fire to keep her distance. And if Futayo approached...

“...!”

Gin easily struck the thrust-forward spear tip with her double swords. And she did so such that Futayo would be sliced in two if she did not deflect it properly.

Normally, bladed weapons were not used to strike other blades. After all, the blades were made of metal. A blade of greater sharpness could cut through it and a strike from the side could bend it. Hitting another hard object could chip it and that chip could lead to a break.

But Gin did not care.

Futayo understood why. She used her double swords, but not to push back Futayo's blade. She was using the recoil.

She would use the force of Futayo's attack to jump over the blade and use the recoil to evade. Using her hands for that would be too dangerous, so she used her swords.

The girl was not taking simple evasive actions. She was selecting from three different interception options.

...She "receives" my attack to stop it, she "sweeps" away the attack to deflect it, or she "shifts" orientation to make me collapse.

When she used the recoil to jump, she was receiving. When she rotated around to evade, she was sweeping. When Futayo's attack was stronger, she would shift and destroy Futayo's balance.

She accurately observed the type and strength of Futayo's attack and then took the appropriate action.

And she kept herself in a safe position by launching the attacks to keep her distance while also taking evasive action.

She did the same now.

Futayo saw the left double sword coming. To cut through that blade, Futayo lifted Tonbokiri up into the space between the two blades. She added an instantaneous pulling motion in an attempt cut through one of the blades halfway down.

But Gin moved. She jumped up, rotated her mechanical left wrist, and grabbed Tonbokiri's blade between the twisted double swords like they were chopsticks.

She lifted Tonbokiri with those sword chopsticks while charging in toward Futayo. At the same time, she thrust in the right double sword.

With Tonbokiri lifted up, Futayo was pulled in toward the other girl. Gin's right double sword was just about to reach her unguarded left side, but she activated Tonbokiri's extension device.

The device would extend Tonbokiri and the recoil would send her backwards where she would scrape low along the ground.

Except that did not happen.

Gin returned her chopsticks wrist to normal and freed Tonbokiri. Nothing now prevented the spear from extending forward, so Futayo was not carried back and the double swords flew straight toward her left side.

“Kh!”

In a split-second decision, Futayo returned the extension device to normal while using the strength of her hands to throw Tonbokiri into the air above so it rotated around. As for herself...

...Below!

She just barely ducked underneath the twin swords.

While the twin swords were pulled back, Futayo stepped back a little and held her hands overhead to reach Tonbokiri's shaft. With the weapon raised overhead, she swung it down while standing up and moving forward.

In that instant, Gin brought her left wrist to something while still clenching the double swords like chopsticks.

That something was one of the Arcabuz Cruz floating in midair. By pressing her wrist against the back of the gun, she forcibly aimed the muzzle toward Futayo.

“...!?”

Just as Futayo leaped to the right, the Arcabuz Cruz fired. It tore diagonally into the deck and Gin used the recoil to jump.

...So light!

She rotated her entire body diagonally to move to the right side of a Western-style house bordering that major street on Tama's port side.

Futayo was half impressed and half shocked. She would evade with pure speed, but this girl used her nimble agility. It truly came down to skillful use of her own body.

And most of all, the fact that she always had an escape path...

...Really pisses me off!

Futayo pursued her. She rotated Tonbokiri in her hands, added in acceleration on her second step, and pursued Gin.

She charged into the side road between the Western-style house and its neighbor on the left of the main road.

Futayo continued on. She charged diagonally into the side road to the right of that Western-style house.

As she did, a shell came from that side road.

Gin had waited for her to enter the road to fire, but Futayo did not care. She extended Tonbokiri into the ground behind her.

The recoil brought her to something.

...A wall!

As if pushed forward into the air, Futayo's diagonally-running body collapsed leftward so her feet landed on the wall.

And she ran. She raced diagonally up the wall of the neighboring building.

“...!”

As she ran along the wall, she spotted her enemy at the intersection between the side road and a back road.

She kicked off the wall and leaped over Gin's head. Instead of taking a falling trajectory, she made a straight jump that passed over Gin.

While passing overhead, she swung Tonbokiri down below to slash at Gin.

She did not land to attack. Even showing that much of an opening was dangerous with this opponent.

But Tachibana Gin moved nimbly as if dancing and did not even look up at the other girl.

“There.”

However, her action did not form an attack.

She moved left as if pulling the Arcabuz Cruz along with her and she ran down the back road behind the Western-style house.

It was nothing but an escape with no attempt to counterattack.

She had run away, but...

Well done! thought Futayo. *She got me.*

The only counterattack Gin could perform when Futayo was in midair was using her Arcabuz Cruz, but firing overhead would send the gun's recoil toward the ground and prevent her from immediately moving.

If that happened, Futayo only needed to cut through the shell.

If she then swung her blade down toward Gin, it would have all been over.

However, Gin had not cornered herself with that simple counterattack. She had predicted what would have happened and escaped.

And that meant...

...Now I'm the one in trouble while in the air like this!

Gin would put some distance between them and then fire safely.

Sounds of scraping came from Gin's surroundings as she travelled down the road behind the Western-style house. As she ran down the road, her cross swords and Arcabuz Cruz caught on the wall of the house.

But Futayo saw Gin turn around at the next corner and he Arcabuz Cruz was looking up toward her.

“Go!”

Futayo pointed the bottom of her spear toward the neighboring house behind her and extended the weapon once more in midair.

She flew through the air to pursue Gin.

Futayo launched herself toward the roof of the house behind the Western-style one. It was a straw roof.

As soon as she landed, the shell was fired from below.

Gin used the recoil of the shallow diagonal shot to leap into the side road returning to the main road.

She was completing her circuit of the Western-style house.

Futayo kicked off the straw roof just before it burst open and she made a great leap. She jumped over Gin's head and to the roof of the house left of the Western-style one from the perspective of the main road.

She began running as soon as she landed and Gin ran toward the main road down below and to her left.

But Gin was too slow. As nimble as she was, she was short. As much attack power as she had, her weaponry was too heavy.

And that meant Futayo could circle around ahead of her.

With the height difference of side road and roof between them, Futayo caught up with her on her second step and moved ahead on her third.

On the fourth, she dug her foot down into the roof and launched herself into the air. She was aiming for the center of the main road directly in front of the side road.

But as soon as she tried to land on that main road, she heard a shot fired toward that landing point.

“!?”

Futayo was confused because the shot would bring recoil. Firing into the main road would bring Gin further back into the side road.

In that case, why had she started running toward the main road in the first place?

...Is she adlibbing? No, were all of her previous movements leading up to this one attack!?

Futayo did not know, but she purposefully fell over as soon as she landed.

She did not come to a stop.

She maintained the momentum of her leap while rolling a few meters along the ground. The road surface she had passed by a moment before was torn apart and the shell hopped back up and collided with the opposite house.

The sounds of splintering wood and splitting household belongings filled the air, but all of the wreckage left the back of the building and none of it came to the main road.

While listening to the racket and feeling the reverberation, Futayo stood up and faced forward.

Before her was the Western-style house of which they had made a complete circuit, but she noticed a certain change to that stone structure.

The left and right edges of the wall had long slices at waist height as if to cut through the house.

She had noticed Gin scraping her cross swords along the house while travelling down the side roads, but now...

“It can’t be.”

Futayo frowned just as the house in front of her exploded as if jumping up into the air.

The house had exploded due to the shockwave of the shots Gin had fired into it from the back entrance.

Two Arcabuz Cruz shells pierced the inner walls from behind and exploded at the main entrance. The shockwave pushed the wall outward from within and caused the house to burst.

Just before that force exploded, the house swelled up and extended upwards.

“...!”

But Gin saw the deep cut she had made in the house’s walls. While running around the house, she had cut it all around the sides and back of the building.

The explosion of the shockwave escaped through those cuts and lifted open what remained.

“Go!!”

As if answering Gin’s cry, the Western-style house was torn open at the “score” she had made and it was lifted up from within. However, the building pitched toward the untouched front wall, tore from the other three walls, and collapsed toward the main road.

“Go!”

It was blasted toward Futayo.

Gin approached the house that showed its ceiling to her and collapsed toward the main road.

...How about that!?

Until then, they had been exchanging line and point attacks, but she had sent in a giant plane attack.

The only way to avoid a plane was to circle around it.

That normally meant right or left, but she had a different prediction.

...I heard her move forward.

She had heard Tonbokiri's extension device and she also saw a spear shaft extending toward the heavens beyond the collapsing house.

She therefore ran forward. She would move directly below her opponent's leap and make a counterattack from that blind spot.

Anything else was too dangerous. After all, it was possible this falling opponent would use her cutting power in midair if faced with an enemy directly ahead.

Gin therefore ran inside the collapsing house and aimed overhead with her back to the house.

...Master Muneshige.

This will restore your inherited name, she thought. No enemy is more powerful than you who gave me these false arms.

She looked overhead at the moons and something flew by with those two pale disks behind it.

It was Tonbokiri, but it was not the entire weapon.

...Just the shaft!?

No one was holding it and it had no blade. Just the shaft of Tonbokiri flew through the air.

...Why?

She questioned it, but she could not sense her enemy to the left or right either.

...Then she must be...

As soon as she sensed danger, the front entrance of the fully collapsed house moved behind her.

The front door of the collapsed house was kicked open from the ground.

“Pardon my intrusion!!”

Futayo ran.

She ducked through the entrance and onto the floor and she accelerated toward Gin’s back as the girl tried to turn around.

...I will defeat her!!

That girl had a certain conviction. She believed that only she, the wife, could save her husband.

Cutting down a completely unique conviction was not easy.

It could not be done without going all out and Futayo needed to settle this in an instant.

To put it another way...

...I cannot let anything be lost!

Whoever the enemy was, Futayo’s master had cried at a loss and told her to stop any future losses.

So...

“You’re mine!”

She wielded Tonbokiri’s tip and the meter-long base it was attached to.

She dashed around to Gin’s right side and swung down the blade with her left arm.

“One!”

From behind, she severed Gin's false arm at the right shoulder.

And as she rushed from Gin's right side to her front left side, she passed Tonbokiri to her right hand, rotated it down and behind her, and then swung it upwards.

“Two!!”

She felt the blow land and sever Gin's left false arm from the armpit and through the shoulder.

As Futayo leaned forward and looked back below her arm, she saw the two false arms fly through the air.

Gin lost control of the two Arcabuz Cruz, so they slowly but surely fell to the floor.

When Futayo heard that dull sound, she took a few more steps and slid to a stop.

Behind her, the house could not withstand its own weight and further collapsed on top of the main road.

With her back to all that destruction, Gin slowly went limp and fell to her knees.

“_____”

Futayo stood up while listening to the quiet creaking and sounds of falling objects that could be called the lingering remnants of the collapse.

She took a breath.

...*Nn.*

Her entire body felt heavy. It was the loss of tension more than exhaustion that horribly dulled her speed.

She honestly felt sleepy and wondered if she would be able to rouse herself in time to save her comrades on the next battlefield.

To do that, she moved her heavy body and walked over to pick up Tonbokiri's shaft.

Just as she grabbed it from where it had landed near the back entrance and placed it on Tonbokiri, she realized her mind had grown sharp.

She wondered why, but there was only one reason: she had heard two solid sounds behind her.

The two metal cases on Gin's shoulders had fallen to the floor.

That alone was not worth questioning. It was not hard to see why they would slip down once the false arms bearing them had been severed.

But as Futayo turned around, she distinctly saw the cases open from the shock of the fall.

...Arms?

They resembled human arms, but they were technically not. The connections of the muscles were black and cross emblems were embedded at the shoulders. They moved up alongside Gin's shoulders and rotated the connection shafts themselves to attach themselves.

And the instant they had connected, the crosses on the shoulders glowed red.

The fingers moved. They did so wildly at first, but soon they softened and formed fists.

"Honestly."

Gin spoke quietly.

"This is what happens when I try new things."



The short girl slowly gathered strength in her knees and stood.

But she was not all that rose. The pulsating light in the crosses on her shoulders caused the large false arms on either side to float up into the air and the Arcabuz Crus were brought with them.

On top of that, her new arms drew something out of empty air.

They were a third and fourth Arcabuz Cruz, but they were longer and larger than the previous ones. Even the larger false arms holding them from behind were not even half their length.

She now had a total of four cannons floating in the air and her new arms grabbed the cross swords.

“Honestly,” said Gin once more. “I never thought I would have to use equipment equivalent to when Master Muneshige defeated me.”

“Equivalent!?”

Futayo’s question received a quiet laugh in reply.

“Don’t tell me you thought what I was using just now was the same as *back then*. These are my arms. At the time, I still had my original arms and I controlled the large false arms and the Arcabuz Cruz using the gravitational control device installed in the cross swords.”

She took a breath.

“This is meant for a swift and decisive battle, so my father and Master Muneshige restricted me from using this equipment, but I was right to bring them now so I would have no regrets. I never thought I would use them against another human again.”

She raised her head and revealed a smile on her face and tears spilling from her eyes.

“Tear into her, Cuatro Cruz.”

After those words, a section of Tama exploded.

Futayo jumped.

She used the extension device to jump to the roof of the house behind the collapsed one.

But after she landed, she next demanded that her body run.

After all...

“...!”

The roof exploded. And it did not happen just once or twice. While she tried to run counterclockwise along the roofs surrounding the collapsed house, the set of four drum-like shells crashed into them.

She was pursued by an uninterrupted series of cannon blasts.

“!”

She jumped from roof to roof as she ran.

She was keeping ahead of Gin's rotation, so she thought she was safe.

Once she reached the road, she would find the wreckage of the collapsed house. It no longer retained the shape of a house, but it had walls and columns. Those might be meaningless against the shells, but they would hide her from Gin's vision.

She ran along the roofs and toward the main road.

And just as her foot was going to step on the edge of the final roof, Gin placed her right hand on the back of the small Arcabuz Cruz to the right.

“There!”

Firing the cannon outwards created leftward recoil that accelerated her rotation toward Futayo.

And that was not all. She raised her left knee while rotating, placed the leg on the large Arcabuz Cruz on the left, and forcibly rotated it even faster.

The muzzle was going to catch up to her and fire, so Futayo made a split second decision.

“Bind! Tonbokiri!!”

The Arcabuz Cruz down below was blocked by the roof so her blade could not reach it, but she was cutting something else.

...The edge of the roof!

With a slicing sound, the edge of the roof she was to step on slipped down.

As soon as her diagonal cut created a gap, she rotated as if throwing herself forward and she sent her body into that gap. An instant later, Gin’s shell flew by her back near the butt. If she had continued to run, it would have hit her waist.

She forcefully extended her left leg in midair to distort her rotation and thus alter the timing of her landing. She used her now elliptical trajectory to give herself the time needed to lift her body upwards. She landed precisely when her center of gravity was not shifted too far down.

She looked forward from her crawling stance and saw the wreckage of the house.

She dashed.

Gin was still rotating toward her after firing toward the roof.

Having fired diagonally upwards, the gun would have recoiled back into the ground, especially with the larger Arcabuz Cruz. The giant cross cannon would prevent her from rotating any further.

And so Futayo charged forward. She stayed low in order to hide behind what remained of the house's walls. Once Gin turned toward her, she would not immediately see her.

Meanwhile, she could see the large Arcabuz Cruz extending diagonally above the wall. Even if Gin did target her, she could determine the shell's trajectory as long as she could see the cannon's movements. So...

...I will win!

Something was different about this opponent.

Perhaps it was that she was oddly insistent on victory.

Futayo was the same, but she focused exclusively on defeating her opponent.

However, this opponent was somehow different and Futayo did not know what it was.

But despite not knowing, she continued on.

She would defeat her. That was all she could do, so she would do it. She twisted the tip of her big toe into the collapsed straw roof as if to run up a vertical surface, but this was on a horizontal surface.

“...!”

And she ran.

Futayo ran.

She had already activated her acceleration spell.

She had speed, so she continued on.

But she saw something.

The large Arcabuz Cruz up and to the left was rotating her way. It would not arrive in time to target her, but Gin's arm suddenly stretched toward the sky beyond the wall.

Gin placed the back of one small Arcabuz Cruz against the front of the large one.

“Here I go.”

With those words, she fired and the large one was pushed so it rotated toward Futayo.

However, Futayo determined even that was not enough. She had made her way in even closer than the barrel of the gun. She knew she would win if she continued like this, so she accelerated.

But an instant later, the small Arcabuz Cruz fired again which created new motion.

“!?”

The large Arcabuz Cruz acted as a high-speed strike from the side that destroyed the house Futayo ran through.

To Futayo, this was like a giant blow from the left.

...Are the large Arcabuz Cruz not meant as guns?

“Are they striking weapons with cannons installed!?”

Futayo realized they were meant for attacking fortresses.

Their shells and physical strikes could pierce the defense spells of a fortress's outer walls and gates.

But she also realized what former Peerless in the West Tachibana Dousetsu, a man with the same level of skill as her father, had given and taught his daughter.

...Those weapons may be made to attack fortresses, but she is using them to protect the fortress that is herself!!

She was protecting the name Tachibana.

She was not the same as Futayo who had been given the freedom to choose whether she would inherit the name.

While Futayo went to battle to compete for victory, this girl had lived a life where loss was unacceptable.

Is that why? wondered Futayo as she blocked the blow with Tonbokiri's shaft.

She identified the *difference* she had felt in this opponent.

...It is rejection!

This was not two people who desired battle lifting each other to greater heights in their exchange of blows.

When Gin fought, it was a girl who had trained all on her own rejecting any who approached her.

All this time, she had continued firing yet not hit, carried out many forced movements, and persistently evaded and attacked, but those things were not being done with defeating her opponent as her top priority. Her countless and unending attacks were meant to do something else.

...Her attacks fill in the gaps to create the fortress walls!

That thought was immediately followed by a blow from the left.

It came in from the side to scoop her up and knock her into the air, but in the instant of impact, she pulled back the arm guarding with Tonbokiri and absorbed the force. She then forcefully extended that arm.

“Hh.”

With a breath, she jumped on her own.

She rotated once in midair and landed in a side road to the right of the main road. She stood in front of the building to the right of the collapsed house.

She tried to raise her stance while landing, but two shadows arrived from overhead.

The two large Arcabuz Cruz fell as if being swung by the two false arms.

The two muzzles lined up directly in front of her. She tried to evade to the right or left, but the small Arcabuz Cruz had already lined up alongside them so they could fire and cut off her escape.

...I have nowhere to go!

Just as she instinctually tensed her body, she heard a voice from beyond the muzzles.

“Tear into her!”

The cannons fired.

Gin watched as the two large Arcabuz Cruz fired directly ahead.

However, she saw the spear-wielding female warrior throw herself forward to charge headfirst into the large Arcabuz Cruz.

It looked like suicide, but the small Arcabuz Cruz prevented her from evading to the left, right, or above and she did not have enough time to crouch down.

In that case, her choice was the best possible one. After all...

...This blast is...

Both of the large Arcabuz Cruz were solid enough to use as striking weapons.

When they were placed side by side, the thickness of barrels doubled in the center.

That was why the female warrior leaned forward and placed her head between the muzzles.

The roars and shells passed by either side of her head and her tied back hair came loose and flew through the air. And beyond that black hair dancing in the night, the opposite house burst.

Gin then saw the look on Honda Futayo's face. This evasion had clearly been perfectly natural for her. She then tried to grab the large Arcabuz Cruz with her hands.

“...!!”

Gin had the large false arms pull back the large Arcabuz Cruz and had the small Arcabuz Cruz fire.

Meanwhile, the black hair leaped toward the road to the right.

Gin turned. She used the push of the small Arcabuz Cruz and of her own right leg to quickly turn the cannons. She pursued and fired on Futayo who jumped into the air and circled around on the roofs and side roads.

They made three rotations.

Gin spun her own body as the axis of rotation in the center of the roaring, the shaking, the wind, the moonlight, and everything else. After one more light spin of her body, she looked around.

Nothing above waist height remained for fifty meters around her.

Nothing, that is, except for a single standing figure. It stood beyond a row of collapsed houses with the main road to their right. And that figure was rushing directly toward her.

Oh, thought Gin. This girl had me destroy the city so I would create a direct line for her to accelerate down.

“That’s crazy.”

The shells fired with those words were easily evaded by Futayo as she charged onwards.

She has guts, thought Gin.

...Did she have me fire at extreme close range earlier in order to dispel her fear?

She most likely had. What she had assumed were cannons had been used as striking weapons. To rid her of her hesitation and to rethink her tactics, she had come to learn the large Arcabuz Cruz’s attack at close range.

Gin found this opponent unbelievable. Fighting was a dangerous thing to someone with an inherited name. Muneshige was proof of that. He was going to lose his name, his relationship with Gin, and many other things.

And so Gin did not want to fight if she could avoid it. And yet...

...How nostalgic.

That quiet thought came to her.

Gin had once fought a certain young man several times.

When her father had first handed her a wooden sword and told her to fight the young man, she had thought the following.

...Why do I have to fight someone so obviously weak?

And he had been weak. He had been knocked down without even lasting a few strikes.

Afterwards, her father had informed her that he was the student working part-time as the local mailman.

She had been confused why she had fought someone like that. After all, he had been tall and the colors his hair and eyes had been different from what she was used to. Also, he had talked a lot. She had honestly found him creepy. That feeling had changed to hatred once her father had told her he wished to inherit the name Muneshige.

Someone completely different from her would become her husband.

She had felt as if her father had betrayed her. She had seen it as a selfish plan between men.

And her hatred and suspicion had made her harsher than usual. She had broken his ribs and other bones several times. But after a week, he had arrived more calmly. He had apparently inherited the name of the leader of the postal system and he had started earning significant amounts of money, so he had said he could be defeated as many times as it took.

Why?

Gin had feared sullyng her name and did not like to fight for fear of losing her inherited name, so why would this person so readily throw himself into that position?

Eventually, the wooden sword had been replaced with a metal pole and then a real sword and his wounds had grown more severe.

However, she had gradually come to understand something.

His methods of attack and evasion were similar to hers.

But even so, he had been unable to win. When he had started thinking after a certain loss, she had said the following to him.

...You cannot defeat me by being the same as me. After all, our bodies and builds are different.

Thinking back, she realized she had given him the answer there.

He had started to learn attacks that used acceleration spells and mastered the fundamentals of combat from her example.

Once the most she could manage was to endure his attacks, she decided to bring it to an end.

...I tried to go all out and reject him.

Even while injured, he had calmly charged forward. When she had sent the strike that would bring it to an end, what was it she had said to him?

...I told him to “watch out”.

But he had surpassed her expectations. He had evaded the attack, severed her arms, and embraced her bloodstained body. He had brought his embracing hands to the stumps of her shoulders and pressed in to stop the bleeding. She vividly remembered the clawing sensation of his fingers directly embracing her nerves and bone.

Whenever she removed her false arms and had him embrace her with his hands sticking into the connectors, it would all come back to her.

She would lose all strength, but she would feel the overwhelming relief of someone embracing the core of her being.

It was a dependence that gave everything over to that feeling of being protected.

She wondered why he had continued to battle her.

She had never asked and she was still too afraid to do so.

Not knowing brought anxiety and so she had targeted his life many times afterwards, but he had calmly accepted it all. When she had served him poison,

she had assumed he would resent her and leave, but he had gone right ahead and eaten it. When she had frantically nursed him back to health afterwards, she had once more realized that she was completely hopeless.

When she thought back, she indeed remembered an odd student who worked part-time as a mailman.

She had always stayed at her house to protect her inherited name and preserve the name of Tachibana the Peerless in the West, but this odd person had always given her a greeting and a smile. The background behind him had always been filled with what lay beyond the Tachibana gate and walls: the cherry blossoms, the sea, the autumn forest, and the snowy plains. But she had never imagined he would grab her hand and take her to see those things.

...But...

Someone had severed the connection between them and she now fired on that individual.

“...!!”

She sent out her rejection by firing again and again.

Futayo forcibly moved forward.

Merely evading was no longer enough, but she could not defend. The most she could do was deflect, but Tonbokiri would not last with any normal method.

And so she thought.

...Someone once defeated this enemy!

That was Tachibana Muneshige, but how had he done so?

She had a hint. During their encounter, he had used a Logismoi Oplo taking the form of a large sword. And now Gin was using two cross swords. In that case, the sword was likely the common weapon between the two of them.

If she assumed her speed and evasive ability was equivalent to Muneshige's, she knew he had to have deflected these shells just as she was having to. So how had he done it?

...Was this it!?

She jabbed Tonbokiri's shaft toward the flying shell at a shallow downward angle.

And...

“!!”

The impact rang through her hands and the shell tore into the surface of the shaft, but it was deflected upwards.

This was the same principle used in angled armor. In other words, deflecting diagonally was better than receiving it head on.

...Just like Adele-dono!!

And as she received the shell, she realized something.

...This is most likely how Muneshige-dono defeated her!!

She looked to Gin's cross swords.

She had two swords on either side for a total of four and Futayo knew what that number meant.

“Truly...!”

She shouted as she charged in at around fifteen meters away.

“You have such wonderful love between husband and wife!!”

The enemy charged swiftly in directly ahead of Gin.

It was difficult to target that position with the cannons on either side because aiming at the absolute center would cause the shells to collide.

That was why Gin shifted the large Arcabuz Cruz so they lined up vertically along the center and then fired.

This allowed the large Arcabuz Cruz to fall back using their own recoil while Futayo moved toward one of the small Arcabuz Cruz on the left or right. Gin also had the large Arcabuz Cruz push her back.

The cannon fire shook the air, but the dancing black hair moved to the right from Gin’s perspective.

She was fast, but the small Arcabuz Cruz on the right was already targeting her.

But just before it fired, Gin saw the girl raise her right arm.

...Is that...?

It was Tonbokiri’s dismantled shaft. It created six pieces when dismantled and she connected and extended two of them.

“...!”

As soon as the small Arcabuz Cruz fired, she threw it deep down the weapon’s barrel.

By the time Gin realized what had happened, she had already fired.

The small Arcabuz Cruz on the right burst into flames and exploded.

She had lost one of her cannons, but it was clear what she needed to do.

She placed the end of the other small cannon on the left side of one of the larger ones and produced a sideways strike at the female warrior.

She fired while falling back further. Only the bottom one of the two vertically aligned Arcabuz Cruz gained the acceleration from the left, so a giant sweeping motion attempted to strike Futayo from the waist down.

However, the girl made a quick jump.

She jumped between the large Arcabuz Cruz that opened like a pair of scissors and she tried to slip through to the left.

...There!

Gin lowered the upper Arcabuz Cruz as if sending a punch.

However, it would not lower.

She saw two of the spear shaft parts standing below the large Arcabuz Cruz as supports. They bent under the weight and finally broke near the center.

However, Futayo had already circled around to her left.

But Gin was prepared for a counterattack.

She would fire the remaining small Arcabuz Cruz while falling back. They were not as close as when the other one had been destroyed, so even if Futayo attempted to throw the shaft into the barrel, it would not travel far enough and would be blasted right back out.

She fired.

But the enemy threw the shaft regardless.

That idiot, thought Gin just before realizing something: the pieces of Tonbokiri's extending shaft were all of different thicknesses.

Before, she had thrown the thinnest portion that was located near the back of the spear.

...But this is a thicker portion near the front!

The shaft travelled only a little bit into the barrel and Gin had already fired.

“Nwoohhh!!”

But Futayo let out a cry and used all of her strength to turn that shaft.

The movement of the shaft twisted and changed the aim of the small Arcabuz Cruz it was sticking into.

The weapon now targeted the large Arcabuz Cruz that was not moving after having just fallen to the ground.

The shell tore apart the shaft from the inside, but it also tore into the armor on the side of the large Arcabuz Cruz. It did not destroy the other weapon. It simply tore off a large chunk of its armor. However, the weapon's security temporarily locked it down in case the impact would cause a malfunction.

Futayo used that opening to move straight toward Gin as she continued to fall back.

“Arcabuz Cruz!!”

But Gin had not stopped the large Arcabuz Cruz that had spun around to sweep out Futayo's legs.

As the weapon rotated in midair, it attempted to target Futayo.

But something flew from behind Futayo's left shoulder with even greater speed. It was now only the base and the foremost portion of the shaft.

“Bind, Tonbokiri!!”

A sound of cutting filled the air and the rotating Arcabuz Cruz was split into a top and bottom half.

“!!”

And it exploded.

Gin reacted as Futayo continued her swing of Tonbokiri and charged in.

“Why!?”

Not even she knew who she was speaking to as she swung the two cross swords toward Futayo.

Futayo continued on. As Gin swung down her left arm, Futayo slipped straight under it.

The twin blades came to strike her, but she threw Tonbokiri's shaft after swinging it around backhanded

That was the sixth and final piece.

The hollow shaft caught one of the swords inside it.

Futayo then grabbed the shaft to grab the sword and swung Tonbokiri.

“One!!”

At the exact moment that the twin swords on the right were sliced in two from guard to hilt, Futayo ran behind Gin and circled around.

Gin turned around and swung the other pair of swords in a backhand blow.

It was a swift strike, but Futayo had predicted it. This opponent constantly attacked as a form of rejection.

...So Muneshige-dono must have predicted this attack as well!!

With perfect aim, Futayo jabbed Tonbokiri into the top blade of the cross sword.

She pierced right through the blade.

With a sound of scraping, the twin swords reverted to a single sword and Futayo leaped high into the air with a forward flip.

She jumped over the single sword's backhand strike and used the momentum of her flip as she landed.

“Two!”

She rotated her spear and broke the final remaining sword.

...That does it.

All of Gin's weapons had been taken from her.

Most likely, thought Futayo as she circled around in front of Gin. Most likely, the flow of battle was similar when Muneshige defeated her.

Gin used two cross swords, but those four swords were enough to neutralize the four Arcabuz Cruz. Muneshige's acceleration spell could be used over short distances, so he would have been able to drive in the swords more efficiently than she had.

...And I used my cutting power for the final strike, but Muneshige-dono must have used a burst of his full strength.

He would have had to bring himself to his limits, much like when he had kicked off the air.

And now, Gin stood unarmed before her.

Futayo wondered what to do, but...

“...!”

She once more accelerated toward the girl.

Not good, thought Gin as she saw Futayo approach. I am going to lose at this rate.

But this was not her loss.

...It is Master Muneshige's loss!

She recalled that precious time when her arms had been severed.

But if someone other than him severed these false arms that were made from her original arms...

...This girl would be on the same level as him.

And so she made a certain decision as her single means of resistance.

“ ... ”

An instant later, her arms flew through the air.

Futayo stopped moving.

She stood one meter in front of Gin.

Everything had come to a halt and she was stopped while crouched down and breathing shallowly.

In front of her, Gin's arms fell to the ground as if being placed there.

They had not been severed. The girl had dropped them herself.

She lowered her head and her bangs hid her expression, but...

“This is my...”

She fell to her knees and then the broken stone rang out as her hips fell to the ground, but she reworded her statement.

“I have lost.”

Futayo nodded and straightened up. She took a breath and realized what Gin’s words and actions meant.

...*I*...

She thought.

...*I did not reach Muneshige-dono’s level.*

Her father had not taught her to cut someone who had no weapon or power, but Muneshige had once severed her arms when she had held no weapons. However, that had not been an inhuman act. Regardless of what Futayo’s father had taught her, Muneshige had determined that Gin herself was a weapon.

I doubt that has changed, thought Futayo.

But Gin had cast that aside at the last moment and Futayo thought she knew why.

...*Could she not cast aside what Muneshige-dono had taught her?*

In that case, victory here more or less went to Tachibana Muneshige.

But what would it mean to say that?

Futayo knew what loss meant for one with an inherited name. Her father had often ignored Ii and Sakakibara when they had asked what he would do if he lost his inherited name. The man had always thrown the other men into the canal afterwards, but Mikawa’s rules did not apply in most places.

And in order to use her right as victor in a way that did not dishonor the loser, Futayo gave a shout.

“The enemy commander, Tachibana Gin, has been defeated!!”

Chapter 68: One who Receives The Night's Finisher

CHAPTER 68

"One who Receives The Night's Finisher"



Can your hand
Reach the sky?

Point Allocation (Moonlight)

Can your hand

Reach the sky?

Point Allocation (Moonlight)

The state of the battle had greatly changed.

The Tres Españan students had left the starboard side of the Musashi, England's privateers were protecting the port, starboard, and rear of the Musashi, and the scattering Tres Españan fleet was raising the density of its attacks.

The Tres Españan fleet was scattering quickly and circling out wider than absolutely necessary so that the English fleet could not hold them in place. Overall, they began moving in a large arc to the back of the Musashi and English fleet. Even as they moved away from the Musashi, they fired their guns diagonally back at it.

“The front is wide open! The mechanical phoenix aircraft carrier is visible! Over!”

Meanwhile, the Musashi was continuing straight forward.

To establish the retreat of the armada battle, they needed to sink an enemy ship in Tres Españan territory. They had chosen the mechanical phoenix aircraft carrier which was stopped directly ahead in order to launch those phoenixes. But since Naito had been shot down after being sent ahead, they were charging straight in to sink it with Horizon's Logismoi Oplo.

However, the aircraft carrier moved first.

“!? The first mechanical phoenix is being launched!”

Everyone on the Musashi realized the enemy had made up their mind quickly. They had likely predicted what the Musashi was doing and were going to withdraw the aircraft carrier after the phoenixes were launched.

“The first mechanical phoenix will arrive in another thirty seconds! Over!”

Naito was suddenly shaken awake.

The way she was shaken felt somehow familiar.

...Is it morning?

But her eyes showed her the flashes of cannon fire in the night.

She dimly yet quickly came to her senses as if her mind was cooling down.

“!?”

Weight returned to her body as if she had been dropped. She had been shaking because there was nothing below her feet. However, she did not seem to be falling and she felt someone embracing her.

She saw a white cloud trail leading east toward the Musashi. As she realized it was a mechanical phoenix, she saw a familiar face.

“Ga-chan!?”

Before she could wonder why the girl was here, she found the answer: a broom. Naruze was embracing Naito with only her left arm and her right hand held up a broom. She then spoke with her eyebrows slightly raised.

“The half-dragon carried me. And luckily, this hasn’t broken yet. So Margot...”

Naito listened.

“Let’s fight and let’s shoot down that aircraft carrier and mechanical phoenix.”

However, Schwarz Fräulein was broken and she had no equipment. Naruze had her broom and she gently moved her wings to make sure they worked, but that

was all. Similarly, Naruze had nothing but the pen in her hand, but the girl definitely smiled.

“I received an interesting divine mail on my way here from England. It must be due to our proximity to M.H.R.R.”

She used the pen tip to display it in a crop mark frame Magie Figur. It contained the emblem of a certain business that served Technohexen and that sponsored these two girls.

“Edel Brocken!”

An instant later, those on the Tres Españan ships or carrying out other aerial tasks saw two sets of wings rapidly rise to the altitude that could be called their battlefield.

They were two Technohexen in an embrace.

One had gold wings and wore the tatters of a Technohexen outfit.

The other had black wings and wore a black Far Eastern uniform.

The two of them gently pressed their cheeks together and nodded amid the crisscrossing shells.

“Okay, Margot,” said the black winged girl. “I won’t help you, so from now on, let’s continue onward together. Let’s live and show each other what we can do.”

She took a breath and placed her forehead on the other’s shoulder before continuing.

“Let’s fly swift and high through the Technohexen sky. We can continue on forever.”

The two of them parted and rotated around as if to show off their form to the other. Then, while checking on the locations of the gods of war and small ships, their voices filled the sky in unison.

“Verwandlung! We agree to the contract to summon the Fräulein newly created for us!!”

Naruze spread her black wings.

“Weiss Fräulein!!”

Naito spread her gold wings.

“Schwarz Fräulein!!”

At the same time, something was spatially ejected behind them. Unlike with the previous Schwarz Fräulein and Weiss Fräulein, the white and black appeared as coffins. Naito’s eyebrows rose when she saw the two meter coffins.

“Wow! Just because they’re new models, they didn’t have to give us individual *sarg*! How much did they spend on this!?”

“Even with the discount for two matching models, it has to be at least as much as a cheap god of war! I’m so glad we’re testers!”

Meanwhile, the coffins automatically opened. The clothes that fluttered out into the air were a new white outfit for Naruze and a new black one for Naito. The Technohexen tools in their hands began to produce a warning sound while the Orei Metallo on the tip flashed yellow.

“Expanding allotted space. A wide area required. Everyone, please be careful.”



Their clothes were removed. They raised their arms a little as the clothes left over the armpit and shoulder and the disassembled clothes passed by the new clothes that expanded from the coffins.

Their skin was exposed only for an instant. The Technohexen inner suit wrapped around and embraced them and the hard points fixed themselves to their waists and necks. Each part of the suit tightened and then loosened slightly to ensure it was skintight.

While making sure not to catch their hair inside, not to squeeze their breasts, and to gently wrap around their necks, the Technohexen outfits enveloped around their users. And just as the white and black skirts and stoles were added, they held up their equipment and let out another shout.

“Come, Schwarz Fräulein!”

“Come on, Weiss Fräulein!”

As if answering their cries, additional steel parts appeared from the coffins.

A ship’s hull attached to Naito’s wooden broom and applied a vernier to the rear brush portion.

White steel attached to Naruze’s pen to form a long spear.

Rectangular bolts were ejected into the air and fixed the different parts into place.

“It’s longer and thinner than before! This is a higher speed version!”

And that was not all.

“!?”

Additional parts attached to their waists and shoulders. Armor that doubled as large attachment parts appeared on their shoulders and expandable accelerators with two rail wings appeared on their waists.

Simply put, they were steel plates and cloth wings. Metallic noises came from the large accelerators on either side of their waist. A Magie Figur with a proof of receipt and simple explanation told them what the rails wings on those accelerators meant.

“We can fly high, Margot.”

“Let’s fly swiftly, Ga-chan.”

With those words, the two colors of Technohexen shot up into the sky.

“...!?”

Naruze ascended more than one hundred meters in an instant and continued to accelerate.

...Eh!?

She did not understand. With her previous Weiss Fräulein, she would have ascended only about thirty meters in that time. Part of the reason she had completely surpassed that was because of the Verstärken Schale of the new Weiss Fräulein, but...

..It’s also thanks to the rail wings on my waist.

The cloth and steel wings were currently sharp and taut like blades. This latest design had frills. The two wings moved on rails and accelerating ether light left the edge of the flaps.

She was already above the fleet and the gods of war that had been targeting her were still looking down below for her.

She felt more surprise than superiority, but the speed also put her at ease.

...This is so fast.

The accelerators on her waists had double the output as the main pen device.

She shuddered when she thought about the fuel consumption, but she was a tester. While it would not be free, she would probably get a discount. Probably, anyway.

More importantly...

“U-um, where’s the enemy ship!?”

It was below her to the right. To her left was Naito who had caught up while being tossed around by her device.

“G-Ga-chan!? U-um, I’m not sure I understand all this, but it’s pretty amazing! So let’s go!”

Naito’s rail wings reacted to her pointing gesture.

They provided an axis of rotation and mobility on both sides. They were set on rails that moved the axis out toward the ends of the wings and the external wings of the main accelerators were swung outwards. The left wing swung the accelerator out to forcibly change its direction. It looked like a bent arm extending to orient the accelerator up into the air.

“Wah!”

Her entire body performed a half rotation as if she had been struck. The rail wing moved back in and both accelerators produced ether light.

Naruze came to a sudden realization as she watched Naito instantly drop down vertically.

“I-I need to follow her!”

While descending, the two Technohexen lightly swung their bodies and tested out their control at these new speeds.

Directly ahead of them was the deck of the mechanical phoenix aircraft carrier.

The white Technohexen went on ahead. She removed the pen from the control panel and read the explanation that popped up in a Magie Figur.

“Yes! I can make spatial drawings! This is the latest tech!”

She drew lines in the air with her pen. The guiding trajectories she drew toward the enemy aircraft carrier really did appear in white lines.

There were four of them and the black Technohexen’s cannon blasts would use those trajectories. That black one pulled four coin roll bullets from the magazine on the side of her device and she suddenly closed the accelerator on the back. Instead, several speedometer-style Magie Figur appeared from the center to the front.

“This Techno Magie Semi Anti-Ship Cannon detonates the accelerating power inside and then accelerates that further!”

She fired on the aircraft carrier just as the two Technohexen crossed paths.

She fired all four rolls of coins at once, they split apart in midair, and they travelled down the guiding lines.

“Herrlich!!”

With what sounded more like crashing sounds than roaring ones, two spots on the deck and a mechanical phoenix about to be launched were shot through.

The hardened wood making up the deck’s surface shattered for three meters around the points of impact and the phoenix had its head slammed into the deck and its right wing torn off at the base.

The two Technohexen shook off the cannons and gods of war firing back and regrouped three hundred meters below the aircraft carrier. They then flew in a shallowly rising arc toward the Musashi.

“Time to intercept the mechanical phoenix they managed to fire!!”

“Will we make it in time!?”

Naito’s expression made it clear that, even with their newfound speed, they could not catch up with the phoenix’s lead. But Naruze opened a sign frame, flew alongside the other girl, and leaned in close.

“Even if it’s a pain, actually read through the manual, Margot. We can make it.”

“Is that...?”

On the bridge, Suzu sensed her Technohexen friends as if she were touching them.

They were growing closer as if pressing together or embracing.

The two Technohexen moved their broom hull and pen spear to their backs and embraced together.

As they did, the connection parts on their shoulders and waists fit together.

Their rail wings moved and spread out horizontally by their legs. Their new shape was created by having their secondary wings spread out to the sides.

...A mechanical phoenix?

The white and black Technohexen combined with avian and delta-shaped wings in front and behind them.

As the two embraced in the center, they distinctly looked toward the Musashi.

“...!!”

And they flew too quickly for Suzu’s hands to keep up.

Their acceleration did not stop even after they surpassed the realm of “high speed”.

They gave a slight cry of surprise, but it felt like even their voices were left behind below their feet.

By combining, the reduction and acceleration of white and black created an induced pressure in the ether pathways. That pressure and inhalation power was then added into the output devices.

And by keeping both their backs oriented outward, the air resistance of their bodies was reduced.

The total of six accelerators in the rail wings, the broom, and the pen gave them enough speed to blast through the air.

At one point, they seemed to break through a wall of wind and the combination of white and black produced a vapor explosion.

“!?”

The Technohexen soon perceived the mechanical phoenix up ahead.

At the same time, the gods of war that had been attacking the Musashi soared toward them.

But they did not hesitate. While embracing, they used spells to detect the flying bullets and other god of war attacks.

“Coming through!!”

After they slipped through those bullets, another wave of enemy bullets arrived from the front, but they located and avoided those as well. They slipped to the side rather than run or evade. They used both of their visions, senses, and reflexes to spin about and continue forward as if dancing.

“Margot! Press against me more!”

“Am I making too much air resistance!?”

“Your breasts feel great!!”

“It’s amazing how you can act like normal, Ga-chan!!”

Meanwhile, they left the shower of bullets. The gods of war attempted direct blows, but the Technohexen embraced while jumping up and rolling as if dancing. They then filled the air with a single great explosion of acceleration light.

“...!!”

And they charged toward the mechanical phoenix as if to slam into it from above.

Adele spoke up when she saw the explosion in the sky ahead.

“You saved us!!”

“B-but we’re out of fuel!!”

Naito’s voice was followed by a white and black flower blooming in the port sky. The two Technohexen’s transformation had ended and they descended toward Asakusa while tumbling through the air. Meanwhile, “Musashi” made some calculations on a sign frame.

“Even if you only had the pre-installed fuel, those must have somewhat poor fuel consumption to run out that quickly. Over.”

“Um, uh, ‘Musashi’-san? Shouldn’t you be a little happier about this?”

But they could now see the mechanical phoenix aircraft carrier up ahead. The damage and phoenix wreckage made its deck useless and it was not moving. Also, the crew had already abandoned ship using a smaller ship.

“Our chaff removal is just about finished,” said “Musashino” as she looked to the aircraft carrier. “Once we secure this ship, we can enter a stable defensive-...”

Before she could finish, Adele saw movement on the battlefield model Suzu was creating.

Something bothered her about the movement of the enemy fleet and gods of war Suzu was creating.

“All Musashi ships, rise!!”

“Eh?” said the automatons.

They likely wanted to point out that they could not secure the aircraft carrier if they did that here. However, they obeyed their current master’s instructions and began the ascent. And just as the Musashi’s port and starboard ships forcibly began a high speed ascent and the sea wrapped around their surfaces, the mechanical phoenix aircraft carrier exploded.

The enemy had used explosion spells.

The San Martíns firing on the Musashi from behind both fully showed themselves as the mechanical phoenix aircraft carrier exploded.

Ahead of them, the Musashi, which was their target, took an ascending trajectory and received the blast and smoke on the bottom. Its speed had not dropped, but...

“It looked like they had noticed, so I had it detonate before they could use some kind of dispel.”

Segundo used binoculars to look forward from the short bridge.

“We knew they would charge in to establish our retreat, so we placed a ship as bait. If it ‘accidentally self-destructed’ once the Musashi was drawn in, we could sink it before they could secure it. And the blast could have severely damaged the Musashi. Even if not, their forward trajectory would prevent them from pursuing

our other ships that had scattered to the left and right. ...But I'm impressed you all managed to gather enough explosion spells from the main fleet's equipment. Was that your doing, Juana?"

"This was the most I could manage. I unfortunately could not actually hit them like you did. But at the very least, they cannot pursue the fleet now. They have already passed by our main fleet, so that main fleet will battle the English fleet while returning to this airspace and pursuing the Musashi. The Musashi can likely use its gravitational cruising twice more, but the San Martíns can catch up once it stalls. We will guide the Musashi while continuing to fire from behind. If the main fleet can circle behind the Musashi, they will be unable to establish our retreat and they will have no choice but to accept defeat."

She pointed at the midair model of the battlefield.

"The Musashi has two choices here. One is to secure the remains of the mechanical phoenix aircraft carrier, negotiate with the other nations, and have those nations accept that the aircraft carrier destroyed itself as a part of the retreat. The other is to transfer all authority to the English fleet and have them pursue our fleet instead," explained Juana. "But the first would be impossible with the other nations so wary of Musashi and the latter would mean giving up everything they have gained thus far. It would show that they could not finish what they started. Both options will mean hell for them."

"Adele-sama, if we are to secure the mechanical phoenix aircraft carrier, you must make your decision in the next twenty seconds. Over."

Adele wondered what to do while the Musashi continued forward and gently rose.

She also wondered if someone would tell her what she should do.

But as she looked around in search of someone to give her the answer, she noticed a certain gaze.

The two who stood on Musashino's bow were turned toward her.

They said nothing to her, but she saw the obvious smile on the idiot's face.

...He's telling me to rely on him as a way out if things get bad enough.

She felt like he was about to tell her exactly that, but...

"That means I have to think on my own. Honestly."

She looked to the sea chart Suzu had created. Currently, the Musashi was being pursued by the San Martíns while it continued past the point at which the Tres Españan fleet had split to either side.

...The question is how to make our way around behind the Tres Españan fleet.

To think about that and get a better view of the model, she circled around to the side.

"Huh?"

Just by changing her perspective, she realized something.

"U-um."

She approached the battlefield model while making sure not to disturb the locations of the enemy fleet Suzu was messing with.

Suzu turned toward her and nodded.

"It's fun."

...Sh-she sure is unintentionally brave!

But Adele wondered if her idea was possible and she tried to come up with a previous example.

...Oh, I know one.

She touched the model of the Musashi, altered its path to show what she wanted to do, and asked the others a question.

“Can we do...this? Like with the transport ship, can we...um...uh...”

All the automatons there gasped just before the bridge door opened and someone ran in. It was Neshinbara. Without bothering to give a greeting, he raised his right hand and prepared to give an order.

But when he saw what Adele was doing, his eyes opened wide.

“Oh, hell! You beat me to it!!”

Juana and the others saw white mist.

It had begun to appear around the entirety of the Musashi.

“A stealth barrier!? They only have enough fuel left to accelerate twice and they’re using up one on stealth!? Why?” asked Juana while frowning. “Have they given up on securing the mechanical phoenix aircraft carrier and are therefore hiding themselves to leave this airspace and abandon the armada battle!?”

Segundo shook his head.

“Just like the San Martín, they cannot maintain stealth cruising for long at high speeds. In its current state, the Musashi can’t travel far enough to escape, so I think this is meant to lose us specifically.” He addressed the others on the bridge. “The Musashi will appear again soon! Also, Fusae and the others will be meeting up with us before along, so be on the lookout! Once you spot the Musashi, fire!”

“Testament!!”

That response was immediately followed by the air down below splitting open and a form appearing.

“Below!?”

The ship had been shallowly rising, but it had instead travelled down below. Juana began determining why.

She immediately calculated out the Musashi's speed and trajectory and reached a conclusion.

“Did they descend using their stealth so they can safely secure the aircraft carrier wreckage!?”

At the same time, the other San Martín fired. Theirs soon did the same while taking a downward course.

The low-speed shells destroyed the form appearing from stealth space and the pieces scattered through the sky.

However...

“Is that...?”

Everyone had assumed the slender form was the bow of one of Musashi's first ships, but it was not.

“Transport ships!?”

Three large transport ships were linked together with towing belts and they were destroyed as soon as they came into contact with the wind in the sky. They burst like a book being opened and scattered even further when they collided with the wreckage of the mechanical phoenix aircraft carrier that remained in the air.

Everyone on the bridge then realized that the transport ships had been launched from the Musashi's stealth space as a decoy.

“Where is the Musashi!?” asked Juana.

One of the controllers shouted a response and this time he had double-checked.

“A massive flying object is appearing overhead! It is the front of the Musashi's first port and starboard ships!”

Everyone on the bridge turned toward the night sky and saw the Musashi appear by tearing through the stealth space.

It was ascending.

However, its ascent was not made by increasing the ship's buoyancy or travelling diagonally.

"It's moving vertically. No, this is..."

The Musashi had made its decision on how to circle behind Tres España's ships and establish their retreat.

"Are they performing a vertical loop in the heavens!?"

The Musashi's maneuver caused great changes inside the ship.

Inertial control was applied inside during gravitational cruising, but that was not powerful enough to withstand a full loop.

The physical stress placed on the ship was massive and there were further problems for the people inside.

Before leaving port, the managers of each area had been responsible for fixing any cargo, transport carriers, or other heavy objects to the walls, floors, or frames. It had mostly been completed while the household belongings were being removed and the normal people were being evacuated, but some people had remained onboard and a lot had not been completed.

That was why the workers inside the ship were placing charms for short-term inertial control to each long and wide block. That would fix any light objects in place, such as documents, books, dishes, or chairs. Everyone took action to ensure nothing would fall during the rotation.

However, they and the other people needed to fix themselves in place too.

The same applied to a certain ten square meter room used as a student dorm underneath Okutama.

Inside, Miriam sat in her wheelchair and held a translucent girl in her arms. The wheelchair was reclined like a bed and it was fixed to the furniture. The leg end was stuck under the desk and the head end was stuck under the bed so that the two wheels on the floor could not move.

She looked to the side where Azuma had his hands on the bed's support column and his feet on the surface at the bottom of the bed. However...

...Is he athletic enough to handle this?

She felt that was a little rude of her, but guys had a way of overestimating themselves. She decided to be more careful.

Azuma had placed charms around the ship before returning to the room. Since he had chosen the room as his evacuation spot, Miriam could not exactly lock him out. So...

"Azuma, are you okay? Can you really last the entire loop like that?"

"What about you, Miriam? You aren't going to fall from there, are you?"

"I'm fine. Of course, if the wheelchair comes undone from the desk, it will crush me."

"Mama, are you okay?"

"Yes, yes." Miriam rubbed her cheek against the girl while thinking how cute she was. "But I think I'm going to go die now that another girl has stolen papa from me."

"C-can we please stop talking about that?"

"Oh? But we brought it to an end after you bowed down in apology. Now I'm just teasing you."

“Mama, did you have sex with papa because he bowed down to you?”

“Judge. But don’t use that word outside, okay? It’s only for in here.”

“Both of the girls are against me,” complained Azuma.

Miriam gave him a sidelong glance and continued speaking.

“So where did you learn the truth?”

“I picked up on the dangerous atmosphere and looked it up in the library.”

“And your thoughts on the matter?”

“The human body is a strange thing.”

Miriam completely agreed. However, ending it there would not settle her dissatisfaction from the past few days, so she exaggeratedly brought a hand to her cheek.

“I can’t believe you kept knocking on the door and asking me to ‘properly have sex’ with you. Does the imperial family continue the Heian period’s culture of sneaking into girls’ bedrooms at night? You’re going to have the imperial police after you.”

“Please, please give me a break already.” Azuma hung his head. “I guess even if it was a misunderstanding, you aren’t going to agree when I keep shouting like that.”

...Does he have any idea what he’s saying?

However, asking and having him deny it would feel bad, so Miriam listened to the ship accelerate and tried to keep things from growing too awkward.

“Azuma, if we make it safely to IZUMO, buy some clothes for this girl. She’s wearing children’s clothes made for ghosts right now, but they don’t seem to be working very well. After all, she’s more of a living spirit or half-ghost.”

“You can tell what type she is like that?”

“Judge. Ghosts are made of ether and it’s the low density of that ether that makes her translucent. But even if she is entirely translucent, her density isn’t so low that she’s blurring together. Look, you can’t see inside her or the other side of her, right?”

Sure enough, the girl’s body was translucent, but the inside and the opposite side of that body could not be seen.

“The surface I see from here and the surface you can see from over there are different, but her translucence doesn’t make the surface I see visible from your side.”

“Um, what does that mean? I feel like Naruze mentioned something about that too.”

He had mentioned another girl, but Miriam decided not to worry about it.

“Well,” she said while thinking through her explanation. “Information is provided in accordance to whoever is looking at her. In other words, she is an information entity that can be partially touched. We only see her as we do because of the information we can perceive.” She paused. “But regardless, I finally accepted that she is our child recently.”

“Could you not say that with that glare in your eyes?”

“Mama, you have to look papa in the eye and have sex!”

Miriam directed her glare at Azuma.

“Is that what you’re into?”

“Y-you really have gotten vulgar lately.”

“And whose fault is that?” she muttered.

Then the floor let out a groan.

It tilted and, while Azuma let out a cry of surprise, it spun as if pressing in against them. It was not a smooth rotation. It instead had a sudden burst of acceleration at about every twenty degrees.

The floor creaked and a splitting sound came from the connections between walls and ceiling. The girl let out a cry, but Miriam held her tight and did not let go.

A solid sound reverberated from outside and water could be heard flowing.

“Was that a water pipe?”

Azuma’s question was followed by several voices coming in from outside.

“Water, water.” “Water you doing?” “But it flows.” “Flows forever.” “The flow won’t stop.”

“They sound like they’re having fun.”

Meanwhile, the ship gave a large tilt, Azuma let out a cry, and he fell from above.

“Kyah!”

Miriam shrieked more from surprise than from the impact and she found Azuma straddling her just below the waist. He glanced around without understanding what had happened, but the ship continued to tilt.

“Ah...wah!”

He tilted back for an instant as if something had tugged on his head and then he clung to her. His head landed on her chest next to where she held the girl.

...Nn.

The ticklish sensation of his clothes just about made her let out a groan, but...

“Mama’s having trouble.”

“Ah! Eh!? M-Miriam? I-I’m sorry!”

“I-it’s fine! And watch out!”

The ship was just about vertical now. Letting go here would send him falling onto his back and she had no intention of going along with his overestimation of himself, so she raised her eyebrows, closed her eyes, and expressed herself with a snort. She then wrapped her right arm around his back rather than around the girl. His left arm also wrapped around her back.

“You can wrap your legs around mine to better hold this girl with me. I can’t feel anything with them, so don’t worry about it.”

“But...”

“It’s fine,” she said. “You have my consent.”

With that, the ship’s angle moved beyond vertical.

It was making its loop.



The air let out a scream.

A massive structure measuring just under eight kilometers rose vertically into the sky, leaned back, and then travelled through the heavens as if to devour the moons.

Its form could be seen far beyond the battlefield. It was seen in England, Hexagone Française, Tres España, M.H.R.R., and Holland.

Those on the decks and bridges of the ships in the nearby sky all gulped and looked up into the sky.

“You’ve gotta be kidding me!”

The event playing out before their eyes caused all of them to think that and some spoke it aloud.

“Like hell that thing’s a quasi-Bahamut. It’s a Leviathan.”

The Musashi achieved its ascent with the thickness of its sea surrounding most of the ships’ bows like tubes. It was the same method used to keep the transport ship standing in England. By pulling up the front, they gained the angle of ascent and the acceleration at the back helped push them on up.

But due to its massive size, even a slight ascent meant moving several kilometers.

It rotated.

Control of the ships was handled by the automatons who had regained their coordination via shared memory thanks to removing the chaff. They used gravitational control to secure the defense units and workers inside the ship and they managed the towing belts to ensure all eight ships rose into the sky as one. The air current travelled down the Musashi’s surface and the temperature difference produced thick fog at the bottom. It looked a lot like the Musashi was producing water spray as it flew up into the sky.

The speed of ascent finally fell, but each ship opened its side hulls in response.

It roared.

The final acceleration was provided by gravitational cruising. By using that, the giant collection of ships did indeed complete its loop.

It moved from vertical to upside-down and then entered its downward trajectory.

“Move behind the San Martíns!!”

Adele shouted her command while being held by “Musashino” on the bridge. She was speaking to Musashino’s bow as it fell vertically where two people stood thanks to “Musashi’s” gravitational control.

“Chancellor! Vicereine Horizon! You’re up!!”

“Turn!!”

The third San Martín that Segundo and Juana were aboard was intercepting the Musashi after Takakane’s small ship had caught up and Fusae’s fleet had joined them.

They had only one thing to do: turn toward and fire on the Musashi as it fell from the sky behind them.

While looping, the Musashi had its back to them. If they turned quickly enough, they could give it a fatal wound before it could attack them.

The Logismo Oplo was a threat, but making this turn was the first step in opposing that.

And so the San Martín made a half rotation by having the small ship push the front starboard side to the left and firing to the left with the secondary cannons on the rear port side.

The vermilion ship quickly spun like a top.

And at the center of that motion, Segundo and Juana stepped out onto the deck by the bow.

The Musashi descended from the sky above. As the giant form wrapped in clouds and mist descended, it gave them the illusion that they were rising.

The low-speed cannon could target anywhere along the Musashi's central line. This was a massive enemy and it had been damaged to the point that any spot along that line would cause a fatal wound.

“Let's win this!”

Segundo felt too self-important saying that, but Juana nodded next to him and the others let out a unified shout.

“Testament!!!”

But it was the enemy that made the first move. Before the San Martín had secured the necessary line of fire, two people took action on Musashino's bow.

Horizon, princess of Musashi, held up the Logismo Oplo named Lype Katathlipse.

Black tearing was fired from the falling Musashi and toward the vermilion ship.

Horizon had fired it while Toori supported her and she checked the torii-style sign frame created from crosses that opened near her. She confirmed that Lype Katathlipse's full overdrive was being used.

“Toori-sama, I desire victory in this battle!”

She nodded and let the wind blowing from below wash over her as she spoke.

“After all, I now have an objective that requires victory!”

“Sure,” he said while embracing her from behind to support her. “We’re finally the same. So do we match? Are we a couple with the same reason for war?”

“Your embrace is a strange thing when you do not try to grope my chest. After all, there is no reason to hit.”

“Eh? So are you saying it’s okay!? Judge, judge. I’m gonna grope you, okay!? I’m serious! It’s time for the tiger show!”

She slammed her elbow into him, but she grabbed his collar and pulled him up when he started to collapse.

“If you move away, my ether supply might stop, so please stay with me.”

“Wait! Is it just me, or am I being used like a battery!? You’re wringing me dry! I’m just a quick charge of energy!”

Horizon ignored him and for good reason.

“Here comes the enemy counterattack!!”

The counterattack came from Juana’s long sword Logismoi Oplo named Akedia Katathlipse.

Akedia Katathlipse’s overdrive created rings of light that bound sins.

“Bind the tearing of that deadly sin!!”

Light raced from the front of the long sword and toward the black claws of light. The light formed an arc as it flew toward the approaching black fingertips.

With a metallic sound and a spray of light, a binding ring suppressed the massive number of fingertips.

All of the fingertips were restrained by the ring of light and they trembled and vanished as if writhing in agony. However, Horizon’s overdrive and Juana’s

overdrive had different strengths. The difference seemed trivial at first, but it gradually grew and the black light approached the vermilion ship.

“Let’s show them a little of what we’re made of!”

Three people jumped in to help: Takakane with Testamenta Arma in hand, Fusae with the half-destroyed Michiyuki Byakko practically dragged into place, and Velázquez.

Takakane took in a breath, stopped, and activated Testamenta Arma: Crus Temperantia – Vetus. Velázquez did the same with Novum.

Michiyuki Byakko expanded the ultra vibration destruction cannons on its shoulders and moved forward with Takakane.

Takakane and Fusae exchanged glance as husband and wife.

“...!”

And they attacked.

Between the two sides, the black claws and the ring of light scattered each other and vied for superiority.

“...!”

But the black began to die down just a little. It had been fired first and Toori’s ether supply was not keeping up because the output was under Horizon’s direct control and a massive amount of energy was needed.

Juana’s Akedia Katathlipse had built up plenty of fuel and it needed less energy, so it began pushing back the tearing claws.

“All right!”

Takakane clenched his fist, but he and everyone else saw Horizon move.

She pulled something from empty space behind her.

“This is the Logismo Oplo named Aspida Phylargia. Neshinbara-sama gave it to me earlier via Urquiaga-sama.”

With her right arm holding the cannon, Horizon held the shield in her left hand and slowly adjusted her stance.

This was Aspida Phylargia and she explained its effects.

“Its normal drive acts as a shield. Its overdrive converts any attack I receive into ether, stores that ether within itself, and becomes the user’s internal Blessings. Functionally, it is a strengthened personal version of Toori-sama’s spell. Its storage limit is likely enough for a single full release of a Logismo Oplo, so I have determined its role is to act as a spare battery for the other Logismo Oplo.”

“Huh? So you don’t need this cute bunny of a battery here? Well?”

“What kind of idiot uses the spare battery first? Listen, Toori-sama. I will use the spare battery only after wringing you dry. Please remain fully charged at all times so you can fulfill your role.”

“D-dammit. I’m gonna give it my all in my new life as a battery! I’m gonna overcharge myself and fill up the gauge!”

Asama: “Um, from a contract perspective, Toori-kun isn’t really a battery. He’s more like a power outlet that taps into Musashi’s ether fuel. A mistaken understanding can be dangerous, so please stop that.”

Mal-Ga: “Shh. Insignificant people like to make themselves sound more important than they are.”

Musashi King: “Why does this class have a tendency to prey on each other like this?”

“I-I got pity from We of all people!”

Horizon ignored him, held up Aspida Phylargia, and looked through the explanatory sign frame that popped up.

“It seems Aspida Phylargia does not let you use all of the stored ether at once with a standard overdrive. It must supply it bit by bit. Weapons that require as much energy as a Logismo Oplo are rare, so I presume it is meant to be used with other weapons and spells.”

“Then how do you fully release it?”

“I presume it requires the soul activation of the third security level.”

The soul activation was when she took her emotion back from the Logismo Oplo by coming to understand that emotion. She knew that from her past experience.

While watching her attack begin to die down, she spoke.

“Toori-sama, I think I will cause you a lot of problems once I obtain the emotion of Phylargia.”

And she asked a question.

“Are you okay with that?”

He answered her while nodding and embracing her from behind.

“Don’t worry. I will always be with you. ...That’s what I decided. I want everything about you, so none of it would be a problem for me. If anything would be a problem, it’d be if you didn’t desire anything.”

So...

“What’s wrong with greed? Let’s desire much, much more, Horizon.”

“Judge.” She nodded and partially closed her eyes. “Toori-sama.”

“Eh? What!? What is it, Horizon!? Are you saying-...”

“I will only say this one. And I have determined it would be troublesome at the moment, so I have will save it for later.”

“Ehhh!? Just say it! Talk with me, Horizon! After all...”

After all...

“When you start a conversation, it’s usually when you’re thinking about something and don’t know the answer. I may not be any help at all, but how about trying it out? Not to mention that I want to hear it, Horizon.”

Horizon had a sudden thought when she heard that.

...This person...

He was mostly made up of unnecessary things, but that allowed him to occasionally offer something that no one else could. She did not know what that was, but if she did not, then...

“Toori-sama.”

She said it.

“I cannot make sense of emotions, but I have determined that is because I do not understand them. But...”

But...

“I do not like not understanding, Toori-sama.”

She paused there and then opened her mouth and throat.

She sang. This was the song that had once expressed her sorrow. It was a fundamental song that likely connected it all together.

“Let me pass, let me pass.”

She gently rocked her body and thought as she sang.

“If I follow this narrow path, where will it take me?”

She thought about the loss of her father and the people who had been injured.

“This narrow path leads to the gods in heaven.”

...If I had desired something then, would things have turned out differently?

“Your opinion is not needed. You cannot pass through here.”

She wanted to know, she wanted to save, and she did not want to lose anything. That was what she thought and what she desired.

“I have come to celebrate this child’s tenth birthday.”

Travelling down her own path had caused conflict and created new loss, but...

“By dedicating these two talismans.”

...But...

“Going may be easy, but returning is frightening.”

She had a thought.

“Can I pass despite my fear?”

If she did not desire to a shameful extent, nothing would change.

...So I will never again bring regret by not desiring something.

She looked around her.

The battle had yet to be settled.

Just how much loss and sorrow had it produced? But...

“Horizon, don’t forget that there are some things you’ve already desired: to fight, to save, and to obtain. It was us responding to those desires of yours that brought us here. So, Horizon, desire only to obtain even more.”

She heard his words as he held her tightly in his arms.

“Your Phylargia will save the world.”

She determined that was a contradictory statement, but she also felt it did not matter if it was.

“Then, Toori-sama, let us double that together. We will harm the world twice as much and save the world twice as much.”

“Twice? But even that might not be enough to stand up to the great loss of the Apocalypse.”

She nodded to say that may indeed be the case. But...

“If it is not enough, the others can join in to make it dozens of times greater. No matter how many people we must oppose and no matter how much harm is exchanged, I will be satisfied as long as we can save the world from loss.”

She took a breath.

“That is my Phylargia.”

As soon as she nodded and engraved that thought into her memories...

“ ‘Soul Activation’ Safety Release : Confirmed”

A massive number of sign frames opened around her. They were torii-style ones created from combined crosses. Instead of scrolling text, they initially displayed a small girl. The girl gave a quick dance and then...

“Logismoi Oplo Control OS : Phthonos-01s : Second Stage : Update : Confirmed”

“Welcome to the Genesis of Emotions.”

In response to the text, the shield in her left hand pulsed with black light.

“Desire a happiness void of sorrow, Phylargia on the Borderline!!”

The ether fuel stored within breathed new life into the black tearing.

And it fired.

Aspida Phylargia accumulated ether fuel when its user was harmed.

The harm to Horizon was her thoughts about the destruction of the Musashi and the loss on the battlefield.

“_____!!”

Not much time had passed from acquiring the shield to using it, so it was not perfect. Even so, it was enough power to push back and consume Juana and the others’ resistance.

In the instant the tearing pushed through, something flew in between the vermilion ship and Horizon.

“The second San Martín!?”

While also protecting the evacuating crew, the no-longer-hidden second ship charged in as a barrier.

The black claws collided with it and tore it apart, but their power ran out there and they vanished.

Beyond the falling second ship, Segundo raised his right hand on the bow of the first San Martín.

“Fire!”

At the same time, the first ship's low-speed cannon fired on the Musashi.

The sound of the shell slicing through the air made its way toward the Musashi's bridge. It was a close range shot and the next shell was being loaded in case the first was blocked with gravity barriers. Segundo swung his hand forward without waiting for the first to hit.

...Let's win this.

But then he added to his thought.

...Let's win this together like we said we would!

He looked to the battlefield and could feel them all there. There were those on the small ships who had fought in the early stages of the battle with him and there were those who had joined later. And he thought about his fellow students who were desperately intercepting the Logismoi Oplo and about Juana.

“Fire!!”

But as soon as he had given that instruction, he saw a new form of interception on Musashi's end.

Standing on top of the bridge was a ninja and a girl in an English uniform who leaned against the ninja. She held two white swords together and flowers made of ether scattered around her.

...Mary Stuart!?

Mary held the two swords of Ex. Collbrande together.

The ether fuel meter on the guard was filled with the blue that indicated it was at maximum capacity.

...But it gathers ether from England's ley lines, so it will become nothing more than a sword once it is used.

She would eventually need to find a way to gather ether, but now she only needed to think about releasing that power.

A man stood on the vermilion ship directly ahead.

She had never seen or spoken with him before, but the history recreation meant she had been married to him on paper, even if it had been quickly resolved. She now bowed toward him and held up her swords.

...Thank you very much.

Her connection to that man was one of the many reasons that she was here now. She decided to shake herself free of many things and to be proud of what she had desired here.

“Master Tenzou, please support me.”

“J-Judge.”

There was hesitation in his voice, but he firmly restrained her while she produced more flowers around herself. Among all those flowers, she raised the swords and spoke.

“Ex. Collbrande, please protect that which I will come to find precious.”

A moment later, a white line cut across the sky.

The eight giant forms descending from the sky brought a cascade of wind down with them and the great compression of air created a thunderstorm in the space between them and the sea.

However, everyone was watching the vermilion ship in front of those eight ships. Its top surface had been almost completely destroyed.

But as the ship began to sink, its crew fearlessly kept their gazes on their enemy.

Finally, a voice came over divine transmission. It was Musashi's vice president indicating the end of the battle.

"This concludes the history recreation of the armada battle between England and Tres España!"

Her resounding voice raced across the night sky that was losing its heat.

Innocentius sighed inside a dark cathedral.

On the primary *cornice firma* in front of him, the land official and the air official of the Lord/Retainer Committee were giving commentary on the armada to the newscaster.

"So right there, they should've gone more whoosh!! Vwoooooosh! That would've done it!"

"I see. So they should have gone vwoosh?"

"No! Like this: Vavwooosh! Vavavwoooooosh!"

Innocentius was fairly certain the two idiots arguing via onomatopoeia were some of the remnants of Kitabatake that had arrived recently. Kitabatake was one of the Far Eastern forces within K.P.A. Italia and they had been subservient to the Murakami Navy. They had ended up here because their master's clan had been destroyed by P.A. Oda.

...Things are gradually getting noisier around here, aren't they?

With that thought, he glanced to the *cornice firma* next to him that displayed the divine chat. His stepsister had already said she was going to sleep and left, but he sent a message to the others.

Pope: "How do you view this result?"

Professor: “Testament. I want to say Musashi has proven that they have the ability needed to achieve the desire of their chancellor/president and princess, but would that be too cowardly?”

Lightning Cutter: “Just looking at the result of the actual battle, it seems Tres España still has most of its main fleet. However, I think what will leave the biggest impression on people is Musashi knocking Tres España’s cutting edge ships out of the fight and the show they put on.”

“True,” sighed Innocentius.

The vertical loop at the end had been nothing more than a performance, but everyone who had seen it would be left with an impression of the Musashi’s great size.

“Everyone will realize they’re done for if that thing is dropped on their city.”

Of course, if they actually slaughtered normal citizens like that or even threatened to, they would make an enemy of the entire world. Innocentius seriously doubted they would do that, but it would still spread unease throughout the people. After all, the Musashi was a giant object that passed by overhead and they would all have seen it on occasion.

At the same time, the Musashi had been damaged on a large scale. It was considerable damage that had very nearly destroyed it completely.

However...

Lightning Cutter: “Musashi has indeed demonstrated their power to achieve victory in a history recreation battle. They struck back at Tres España after being damaged by them and, just as Master Galileo said, they have taken a step...no, two steps toward granting the desire of their chancellor/president and princess. After all, no other nation will step forward to help even if Tres España tries to use the bargaining chip of war against Musashi. Also England will have a hard time of turning on Musashi due to what they did for England here.”

In which case...

Pope: “In terms of the coming Peace of Westphalia, Musashi has worn down Tres España’s influence and gained England as an ally? Is that what you mean? Hm?”

Both: “Testament.”

Innocentius laughed at that response from the representatives of the intellectuals and the fighters. He was glad this was being done via divine chat. The looks on their faces would be bitter indeed had they known he was laughing.

...Does that idiot – that idiot who opposed me and called me an idiot – understand any of this?

He had a feeling he knew exactly what the idiot would say if he asked.

“As long as someone else understands it, isn’t that good enough?”

Innocentius shrugged and emulated the idiot’s manner of speech. After a quick pause, he brought a hand to his face and several laughs came from his throat.

...This really has gotten ridiculous.

Pope: “England returned one hell of a deadly sin to Musashi’s princess: Phylargia. I doubt anyone in Musashi has fully realized what they have obtained in this battle. From now on, their princess will not hesitate to desire the deadly sins. She will give into her greed and desire her emotions while advocating world peace as the parallel to that idiot who advocates world domination.”

Innocentius typed in his thoughts and considered the meaning of what Musashi had gained in this battle.

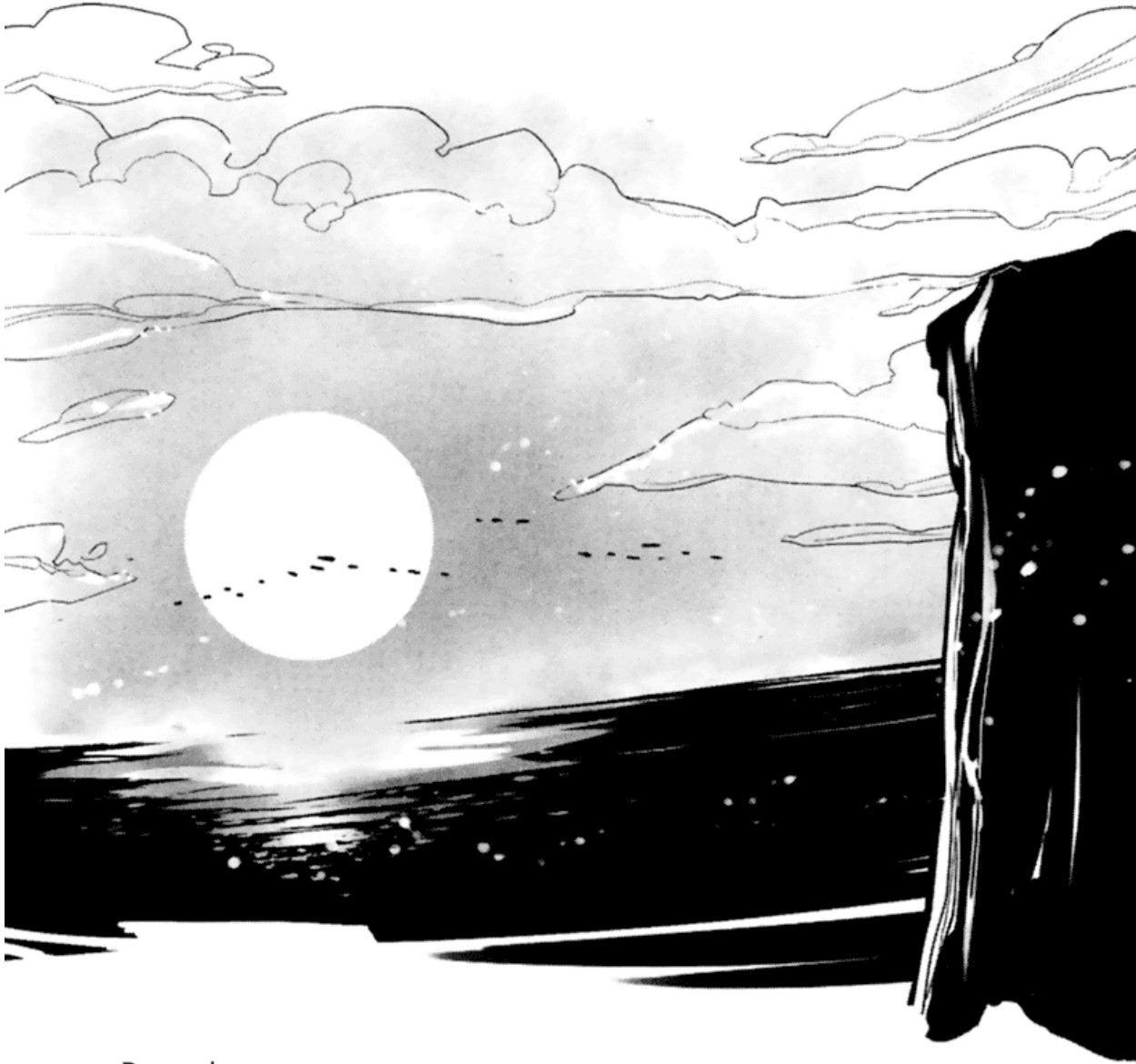
...They have shown the entire world that they are able to interact with the other nations on equal terms.

Pope: “They have finally risen from the lower ranks and stepped onto our stage of repeated history. And they have done so as an actor with a part to play!”

Chapter 69: Those Gathering at the Fire Festival

CHAPTER 69

"Those Gathering at the Fire Festival"



Do you have someone
To hold hands and dance with?
Point Allocation (Taking Part)

Do you have someone

To hold hands and dance with?

Point Allocation (Taking Part)

Two days had passed since the nighttime naval battle.

Countless objects were traveling through the evening sky along with the gentle west wind.

They were a fleet of aerial ships that watched the sun set to their right and Tres Españan flags hung down from the side of their decks.

“Juana, couldn’t we return to Lisbon along with the main fleet while hiding the damage with flags?”

“Testament. We do not get triumphant return. We lost the armada battle, so if we tried to have one, the Testament Union would accuse us of ignoring the Testament descriptions. Today, we must hurry back to Henares.”

Juana then turned ahead and to port to look at the hills surrounding the bay.

Once they entered the bay, the fleet would land in the water and take turns heading in for repairs whenever a dock opened up.

We have a huge amount of work to do, she thought. And there is just as much meaning in finishing that work.

...The biggest task is getting Tres España back on its feet.

She had a number of ideas and she was sure to come up with more in the future. Takakane and Fusae remained out at sea to represent the number of days the armada battle was meant to last, but once they returned, she would discuss a lot with them and ask them for help. And to do that...

“We need to find a new name for the 2nd special duty officer to inherit.”

“Can you search for an appropriate name in Tres Españan history?”

“Testament. I’m just so used to calling her ‘Fusae’.”

But something else concerned her more.

“What should we do about 3rd Special Duty Officer Gin?”

“Have we still not managed to contact her? My guess is she stayed on the Musashi.”

“Testament.” Juana nodded and opened a few *cadena firma*. “I actually checked with Musashi. It seems her injuries are being treated there as a guest. However, it seems she has doubts about her performance and is putting off her return.”

“Not only did she fail to return Muneshige’s inherited name, but people have a way of obsessing over a loss.”

Segundo’s words left Juana momentarily speechless, but he soon turned toward her.

“Oh, um. You don’t have to read too deeply into that, okay?”

“Eh? Oh, Testament. I won’t. ...Anyway, there is something we must tell Gin, so we do need to contact her.”

She sighed and lowered her shoulders before continuing.

“But even if you aren’t going to obsess over your loss, I think the other nations will. After all, chancellor, you lost twice in a single night.”

“Even I think that was a little much.”

“Yes.” Juana lowered her shoulders again. “And things aren’t going to be easy for me now that it’s out that I am half-lived.”

“It wasn’t officially exposed, so don’t worry. Also, everyone knows Tres España won’t last without you.”

“Testament. But I won’t listen to something I find unnecessary even if you are the one to say it.”

She said that with a smile while the sun set to their right. Starting from the east, the sky slowly changed to purple and the stars began to stand out. Also, two waning moons floated in that eastern sky.

“Ahh,” muttered Segundo. “It really is over, isn’t it?”

She wanted to say something, but the ship tilted before she could. They were crossing the hill to enter the bay.

The bay up ahead was dark. What little light remained in the sky seemed to be filling the bottom of the bay in dark shadow. The only light down there were the few fires meant to guide ships.

Once they arrived there, the armada battle would be over.

...And we can’t exactly say something new will begin.

One event recorded in history had been completed and more would continue.

It could be said that none of it was new, but Juana reminded herself that they had not existed in the former world and neither had Musashi. And so...

“It is not over. ...It has been made new, chancellor.”

“Has it really?”

Juana wanted to say “testament” and tell him to trust her, but the port in front of them suddenly filled with light.

These were not the fires for guiding ships. There were many, many more of them and they came from raised torches.

“Eh?”

She heard sudden noise. It came from the drums being played and all the fire being held up into the sky.

The fires illuminating the dark port were small, but they grew in number and soon filled the entire port. Amid those flames and swirling sparks, the beating of drums travelled far, far into the distance.

“_____!”

She heard voices. They were cheers and Segundo muttered absentmindedly when he heard them.

“This is the *falla* festival. But why?”

“I doubt this is everyone from Tres España. It is probably your old friends, those who support us, and those who have no choice but to do so. But...”

Juana spoke blankly before the growing fires and noise.

“It means that we have others on our side.”

Segundo made a sudden comment.

“We use the money we have, give in to our passions, have a party, and forget everything unpleasant.”

As she listened to that, Juana saw the fires continue to grow in number and density. Everyone naturally formed rows to make sure their raised torches did not hit anyone else.

The port warehouses created gaps in the flames that looked like giant ships and those warehouse ships rocked in the waves of the flickering flames.

...It's like they're saying they are ready to leave port at any moment.

Meanwhile, Segundo brought a hand to his chest and took a breath.

“I made a promise to go to the *falla* festival after the Battle of Lepanto. And I also made one to dance there.”

He slowly asked a question to himself.

“Will all of them forgive me if I go to a new fire festival?”

There was no answer to that. If there was one, it was everything he would gain from now on. He would find his answer when he created an even better festival than any he had experienced while with them.

...And we will help him do that.

And so Juana nodded and opened her mouth.

“Claiming to forget everything unpleasant is just for show, isn’t it? You and I, Gin, and everyone else can never forget those things. Giving into our passions and having a party is not to forget.”

She held his hand as she spoke.

“It is so we can believe that there will still be fun times in the future.”

Fires much like festival bonfires rose into the night sky.

They were located on eight ships that floated in that night sky. Among the many fires, the one on the second starboard ship was the largest and it gave a crimson glow to the bottom of the nearby clouds.

The firewood was made from the building materials that could not be reused. It mostly came from buildings on the surface, but it also included floors and columns used for the internal support frames.

The fire was about seven meters across and two meters tall. Asama and others from the shrine were managing the fire and the rising flames functioned as a

dedication. It was mostly gods of war and automatons in charge of throwing the firewood onto the floor made from armor panels.

However, some of the students were approaching cheerfully.

“I was looking for a chance to throw out these porn magazines, so I’ll dedicate them to my god! To my god!”

“These are actual letters from the guy I used to date! ...Why did he have to write these poems!?”

“Um, are figurines non-burnable dedications? Can I just leave them here? Okay, thanks.”

They seemed to see this as an opportunity.

Meanwhile, a certain girl was in charge of throwing in the firewood in their place. She wore a Tres Españan uniform and had two lifelike false arms attached. She was Tachibana Gin.

The emblems on her shoulders were glowing red as she tossed the firewood via gravitational control.

Occasionally, the students leaving firewood for her would realize who she was and raise their eyebrows, but she would give a nod to instruct them to place the wood in the loading area and continue with her job.

“But...”

She looked to the blazing fire and muttered to herself.

“What am I supposed to do?”

Gin had yet to sort out her thoughts and did not know what to do with herself.

She had lost, yet she was shamelessly living on after the battle.

...I had thought about dying, but...

When the Musashi had made its loop, she had understood what was happening, so she had tried to head out onto the road. She had assumed it would all work out if she fell down with nothing to support her. After all, she had lost the battle she had decided to take part in, so she thought it would be best to no longer decide anything for herself.

But when she had moved toward the road as the ship had tilted upwards...

...Honda Futayo ran toward the stern of the ship after having previously left for the bow.

Gin assumed she had moved toward the stern in search of a level area like a hamster in a wheel, but it had obviously been a futile attempt. Gin had instinctually evaded and returned toward the house and a pillar there had saved her from the loop. Her false arms had fallen inside a remaining house toward the stern of the ship, so they too had remained. All in all, every part of her had survived.

And she had subsequently been protected and treated as a guest.

The Musashi was currently moored in the sky fifteen kilometers north of IZUMO. They were apparently making what repairs they could with the old maintenance equipment before entering IZUMO. That way they would not worry those already in IZUMO by letting them see the damage to the Musashi.

...And it opens up space to store materials.

They needed to make repairs at IZUMO, but there was no land port there to leave the massive amount of materials around the Musashi. Those materials would have to be carried inside the Musashi and stored in its own warehouses. And that method also gave them control over the purchase and transport of the materials which helped keep the prices lower.

A lot of workers and laborers had arrived from IZUMO and they were helping Musashi as it repaired itself and attempted to continue to its next destination.

“But what am I supposed to do?”

She had her thoughts about having lost, but she was also worried for Muneshige. She had been unable to restore his inherited name, so he would have no choice but to leave her.

...And I will probably lose my inherited name as well.

According to the Testament descriptions, Tachibana Muneshige eventually left Ootomo and joined Hashiba. After what had happened, M.H.R.R.’s Hashiba would likely pressure Tres España to transfer rights to the name to them.

It all went back to her being weak.

Some people were eating a slow meal in the distance. They were the students who had fought two nights before. They had all helped repair the ship and spent their time together.

One of them laughed and the young student spoke to the others his same age.

“It’s true! That idiot called out to the front line where I was! And I told him to stay away because he’d just be in the way! I told him we didn’t need his help!”

A group of older students passed by and one with a fresh scar on his cheek tossed a bottle of water to the younger boy. The older boy smiled at the younger one.

“Did your brain slip out because you had some alcohol? Try cooling your head with some water.”

“Shut up.”

Everyone laughed bitterly and Gin once more realized she was alone.

She became painfully aware of that fact. The blowing wind and the crackling flames were so close by, but they sounded so very far away.

...Will I be alone forever?

She felt like the core of her being was missing and she slowly fell to her knees.

...What am I supposed to do?

She had tried to win and restore his inherited name.

However, she had lost and now nothing remained. Even her own inherited name was in danger.

...What am I supposed to do?

She repeated the thought while lowering her head. Her shoulders trembled and she fought the urge to cry. She told herself that crying would not bring her any forgiveness, but she still opened her mouth.

“Master Muneshige...”

I'm sorry, she said in her heart.

I'm sorry. It didn't work. I couldn't do it. I couldn't save you, help you, or anything else. I dishonored your name and my name, but now I just want one thing.

“I want to see you.”

As soon as she muttered those words, she heard a voice in front of her.

“Then lift your head, Gin.”

Her head shot up at that voice.

A tall figure was lowered on one knee with the burning flames behind him.

“Master...Mune...shige?”

She could not believe her eyes, but even if his face and body were skinnier than before, it was definitely him.

He wore a work vest with the armband that indicated a laborer from outside.

But...

“Why?”

He answered her question with a smile.

“Because I knew you would cry if you were alone.”

He explained why.

“When we went to that festival for our very first date, you went off on your own and got lost. When I found you, you were crying near the festival bonfire much like this. And it happened a few other times as well. That’s why the chancellor always gave us missions together.”

She wanted to say that was ridiculous, but...

“... ”

Tears spilled from her eyes and he quickly moved with a troubled look on his face.

“It’s okay. It’s okay. I was afraid of arriving and finding you had already left, but the chancellor contacted me to say you still hadn’t returned. That’s when I shouted ‘amore’ five times and raced to Hexagone Française. I only just arrived, but...well, it all worked out since I found you here.”

“I-it all worked out? B-but it didn’t! You...you lost your inherited name! And...and who knows what will happen with me.”

“Then how about we both lose our inherited names?”

She did not understand what he meant until he continued.

“Will you spend the rest of your life with a man who lost his inherited name and is not Tachibana Muneshige?”

“Wh-what about you, Master Muneshige!?”

She asked the question she had long wondered.

“Do you want to be with an unsociable girl who is not even Tachibana Muneshige’s wife!?”

“I do not.”

Gin thought her heart was going to break when she heard that, but then he embraced her.

“Not unless I can spend the rest of my life with her.”

He wrapped his arms around her shoulders as he embraced her. Those were the shoulders she had once lost.

“Come to think of it, this is the first time I’ve hugged you with your normal arms.”

She cried at those words.

...This person is...

He was an odd person.

Whenever she had seen that odd student who worked part-time as a mailman, one thought had always come to her.

He always appeared with cherry blossoms, the blue sky, the autumn leaves, or the snow behind him, but why was he in that world?

She found him an odd person to live in that ever-changing world that was protected by no one.

But ultimately, she had decided that she wanted to be with him forever.

And now he spoke to her from beyond her tears.

“Let us grow stronger. And then I will inherit the name of Tachibana Muneshige by truly being the Peerless in the West.”

She wanted to say that was absurd. How could he say that when he was so skinny and had lost so much muscle in his leg? But the arms embracing her were strong and reliable and the words she heard were steady.

“And when I become Tachibana Muneshige...”

Then...

“You will be my Tachibana Gin.”

Gin nodded and decided to trust him. He had once exceeded everything she could have imagined, so she swore that she would one day support his position as the Peerless.

...So for the moment...

She entrusted her body to him, took in a deep breath, and slowly let it out.

“ ... ”

She closed her eyes in his chest as if sinking into exhaustion and relief.

Last Chapter: Greedy Ones Crossing a Border

LAST CHAPTER

"Greedy Ones Crossing a Border"



Why do
People move?
Point Allocation (Relief)

Why do

People move?

Point Allocation (Relief)

Two people walked through a dimly-lit residential district in the middle of the night.

One was Masazumi, a girl wearing the coat of a boy's uniform.

The other was Mary, a girl wearing an English uniform and carrying two swords at her waist.

Masazumi was leading Mary through the residential district below Tama.

“Principal Sakai should be finalizing your transfer here, Mary...no, Lady Mary?”

“Just Mary is fine, Lady Masazumi. I am grateful you are working on completing that process so late at night. Especially as it has only been one week since the armada battle.”

She said it with a smile and continued right on, so Masazumi could only obey. As they walked down the corridor, Masazumi gave Mary quick explanations about the public restroom, kitchen, and simple contract spots for different religions. She also explained the rules for the snack shop.

But despite how late it was, sounds of construction could be heard from both above and below.

One week had passed since the naval battle. They had only just completed the inspection of all the damage and removal of destroyed materials. Everyone from the academy was out helping with that on Oriotorai's instructions.

...I haven't gone home much recently.

The anteater on her shoulder seemed to have gotten used to life here. It would now leave the hard point almost immediately.

“Maa.”

It would always make that same cry and she thought it was either the “ma” of “Masazumi” or...

“Is that the ‘ma’ of ‘mama’? What is its name?”

“Judge,” said Masazumi with a nod.

Due to the young anteater’s injury, the area of white fur around its neck had grown thicker and she had named it after that.

“Tsukinowa.”[\[3\]](#)

“You named your anteater after a type of bear? You have...um...interesting tastes.”

“Thanks for the forced response.”

As she spoke, a brown algae creature poked its face out of the ditch and looked at Masazumi and Tsukinowa.

“Maasazumi?”

“Maa.”

Feeling oddly embarrassed, she waved and walked on. There had not been much damage below the surface. The areas hit by the large stakes were an exception, but it seemed people would be living in the underground areas more often.

...But there are quite a few places up and running on the surface too.

The fire damage had reached as close as two houses away from her own house. However, the homes on the surface had belonged to the wealthy, so a lot of them were using this as a chance to move elsewhere or create a building that could

function as a base of operations even during a battle. Fortunately, the Blue Thunder on Tama had only lost its windows.

It had removed the window frames and was now functioning as an open-air store while trying its best not to run out of ingredients while the students stopped by.

...But we did lose a lot.

Once they met up with the residents who had gone ahead to IZUMO, quite a lot explanations and compensation would be needed.

The Musashi was already near IZUMO and Grace and the English ships had left about half a day ago.

They had gained some things as well, such as their relationship with England.

“Oh?”

Mary turned toward two people wearing vermilion uniforms who walked toward them on the other side of the corridor. They were Tachibana Muneshige and Gin, husband and wife.

They likely had their reasons, but it seemed they had sent Tres España a request to remove both their inherited names. While settling the post-battle issues, Masazumi had spoken with their secretary over divine transmission, and he had said, “Tell them there’s nothing wrong with that. Also tell them to do the best they can.” There would likely be an official notification eventually.

As they passed, the husband bowed toward Masazumi and the wife gave a small nod.

Sakai had already invited the two of them to transfer to the school.

...Principal Sakai is definitely viewing this like putting together a party in a video game.

She wondered what they would do and what would happen.

“From what I hear, I will be in the same class as you and Master Tenzou.”

“Judge. That seems like it would cause the least trouble. But if you come across anything you don’t understand, just run away or avert your gaze. Those are your best bets.”

“Judge. Is that a superstition meant to ward off bad luck?”

A group of kobolds carrying bricks passed by at their feet.

...This ship has really grown chaotic over the past few months.

“Where is the Musashi headed now?”

“Judge. After our repairs at IZUMO, I’m thinking of heading to M.H.R.R.”

“For Westphalia?”

“No,” said Masazumi while shaking her head.

She honestly did not believe the other nations would join their side given the current situation. They had shown their ability to fight during the armada battle, but a lot of nations would avoid them because of that. So they first needed to increase their legitimacy.

“I want to learn more about the Apocalypse and so I want to investigate Chancellor Carlos I.”

Mary’s eyebrows rose slightly when she heard that name. She then closed her eyes and nodded.

“If there is anything I can do to help, please ask.”

“Judge. I’m guessing there will be. My plan is to pass through the Protestant principalities, but it’s still more or less P.A. Oda’s territory. There will probably be some kind of trouble.”

Thinking about what would happen in IZUMO also left her feeling heavy-hearted.

But, she thought. We somehow managed to arrive in England and I feel like we gained a lot from that.

One example was the girl walking alongside her.

...Did we manage to protect her life?

After the incident with Horizon, she understood that concept quite well and her thoughts turned to the person who had made it all happen.

“Is Tenzou not coming out to greet you? Even though it’s your first time here?”

They stopped in front of a wide block building. Specifically, they stood before the door to a six square meter room.

Masazumi heard the sounds of objects sliding across the floor or being piled up, so she guessed Tenzou was cleaning up the room.

“I haven’t known him for long, so I can’t say much. Still, I can tell you he isn’t a bad person. It seems his father kicked him out of his house for being a traitor, but that father is an important member of Musashi’s ninja guild, so...um...good luck with all that.”

“Thank you very much. But...”

“What is it?”

Mary smiled while Masazumi tilted her head and the anteater on her shoulder emulated the action.

“You somehow remind me of my sister.”

“Please spare me.”

After Mary exchanged parting words with Masazumi, Tenzou saw the girl enter the room.

It was a small room measuring only about six square meters and a bed stuck out from one wall.

“Mary-dono, would you like the top bunk or the bottom bunk?”

“Hm? We won’t be using the same one?”

...Th-that’s getting ahead of ourselves!!

“U-um, w-well, the beds are a little small for that.”

“Judge. Then let us work hard so we can move to a larger room.”

Tenzou felt he had made a terribly careless mistake here, but he decided it could be resolved through negotiation. He went on to explain the dirt floor by the entrance, the ventilation and drain connections, and the simple kitchen.

“The bedding is...”

He looked down and found she was already laying out the bedding. She was clearly used to doing so. It was already late and they would be busy the following day, so...

“You get to sleep first. I have a lot of luggage to take care of.”

They were going to live together, but she had no luggage. All she had were the clothes she wore, herself, and...

...Not many wives bring Excalibur as a household possession!!

Meanwhile, he heard the sounds of her coat being removed and the bedding being patted down.

“Hee hee.”

He then heard her lying down on the bed.

“I can make a bed all on my own. Next time, I will make yours as well, Master Tenzou.”

...I'm going to have to change my habit of hiding porn magazines under there!

He then heard her touching a paper box.

“ ‘From some sympathizing boys’? Master Tenzou, is this a gift from your friends?”

“Ah! No, that’s-...!”

He peered down below and saw her pulling a case from the box. Her cheeks were flushed and she spoke in a troubled expression.

“ ‘Climax! Virgin Queen Elizabeth’? M-Master Tenzou... Was my sister more your type? Did the others give you this out of consideration?”

“No, I actually already had a copy of that one! A-and, I preferred that game’s sub-heroine over the main one!”

“The sub-heroine?”

Her face grew even redder as she lowered her head to read the explanation on the back of the box.

As the model for that sub-heroine, she gave her thoughts.

“D-does this mean my breasts need to be a little bigger?”

“O-of course not! You are the best as far as I’m concerned!”

“I see.”

She smiled, straightened her sitting position, and bowed.

“Thank you very much for taking me in. ...I felt I had to say that before going to sleep.”

“Oh, um, I also need to thank you for-... Mary-dono?”

After straightening up, she started removing her clothes. An odd panic came over him and he wondered how to stop her.

“I thought you were going to sleep.”

“Judge. I am, but I cannot sleep unless I am naked.”

“Nhh!”

As he leaned back and collapsed on the loft, she continued to speak down below.

“If you ever want to sleep with me, feel free to climb into my bed. I will recognize you from your presence. And when you do, please let me see the scar on your back. I want to see it.”

This is going to be hell, thought Tenzou. At least it will be while I am a student. The others are going to make fun of me more than any other point in my life.

But he had another thought and he gave voice to that one.

“Mary-dono.”

“Yes?” she replied.

“I would like to become your scar.”

“Oh? What are you saying?”

Her voice contained a mixture of smiling and crying.

“You have already scarred me plenty.”

He heard her place the blanket over herself.

“You scarred me and protected me.”

Mary closed her eyes in the bed.

Her breathing trembled in both relief and happiness and she felt tears when she brought her hand to her cheek.

I have done nothing but cry since I met him, she thought.

“Save you from anything.”

She had been protected by a great number of people, but she had chosen only one of them.

...The one who understood the meaning of my scars and desired them.

He had protected her from herself.

It seemed contradictory to say one could not be protected if one was not scarred, but she had another thought as well.

She had desired to be scarred and she had also desired to be protected.

...That is Phylargia.

However, she gave her silent thanks to the current situation and the fact that her greedy desire had been granted.

She decided to bear the name Double Bloody Mary with pride.

That way she could reward those who had placed their expectations in her and that way she would not forget what had happened.

“Master Tenzou.”

While falling to sleep, she spoke slowly to his listening presence.

“I think I will bloom with happiness by your side.”

“Desiring farther and farther into the future is greedy.”

A silver-haired automaton spoke on the bow of Asakusa which was being repaired.

In the southern night sky ahead was the northern coast of Hexagone Française. Beyond a mountain range near that coast, a single island floated above what could be called a valley.

It was higher than the mountain ridge, but it was not so high that one had to look up at it like with England. It slowly travelled between mountain ranges.

“That is IZUMO and those are the nations we will be visiting next.”

She and the boy next to her saw many lights in the night. The lights created by the people living there gave a general outline indicating the shape of the mainland and the floating island.

And those lights continued as far as they could see. The lights of Tres España could be seen to the east, those of Sviet Rus could be seen past M.H.R.R. to the west, and those of K.P.A. Italia could be seen beyond the mountains and IZUMO to the south.

The automaton held her hand out toward those lights. She was not measuring the distance or trying to grasp them. She simply swept her hand from left to right across the wall separating her and all those people.

“Toori-sama, to be honest, I do not know if I am right or wrong. However, I have determined I can maintain the middle road as long as I have you as my parallel.”

“Judge. I’m the same. If I do something wrong, you’ll hit me for it. That’s what you mean, right?”

“Judge.” She nodded. “From now on, we will gather my emotions while investigating the Apocalypse. Isn’t that right, Toori-sama?”

“Are you sure?”

“Judge,” she said again. “If I do not desire the deadly sins of mankind, I cannot understand why mankind feels sorrow. If I wish to truly rid the world of sorrow...” She nodded again. “I must understand the greatest sorrow.”

“Just make sure you smile in the end, Horizon.”

“Then when I do...”

She turned toward him.

“Will you cry?”

“Horizon, have you changed a little since you got Phylargia?”

“Have I?”

She glanced back toward the lights of the Far East and then continued speaking.

“If you wish for me to smile after passing through the world, my emotions, and everything else, then I think this is what my greatest Phylargia asks of you.”

“Yeah, you used to make me cry a lot in the past.”

“It seems we are parallel.”

She had once cried and it had led to a parting. Knowing that, she stopped and turned her back on the lights of the Far East.

“Let us go back inside. I am feeling tired.”

“Are you getting another new feature?”

“Who can say? Sleep can be seen as a way of regulating sorrow and anger, and also as a way of putting happiness to memory. Either way, I can say one thing for certain: the desire to sleep is one part of greed.”



— I will no longer hide my scars.

She looked him in the eye before continuing.

“Is it greedy to ask for everyone’s happiness before I go to sleep?”

I will no longer hide my scars.

Notes

1. [Jump up](#) ↑ Using the Japanese word “oppai”.
2. [Jump up](#) ↑ Manco/Manko is Japanese for the vagina.
3. [Jump up](#) ↑ Means “circle of the moon”.

Afterword

Here is Kyoukai Senjou no Horizon 2-B.

While things had “started moving” before, I feel that they “are moving” now. From here on, they will be more actively involved with the other nations and any middle or high school readers will probably find points of overlap with their Japanese history and world history textbooks.

In this age, there was still a strong element of fantasy even in real life, but it’s interesting to see what surprising things they already had or did not yet have.

Take Spain’s bullfighting for example. In the 16th century, bullfighting was done by knights on horseback. The style that used a matador on foot came about around the 18th century and that’s when the bullrings were built. These origins, continuations, and reforms leading to “the next style” of cultures or civilizations are linked with the changes to society, but I think this period changed quite a lot on the cultural front even for an age of reform. (I kind of feel like the reform of

civilization began with “steam”. Maybe you could say fantasy is stability and steampunk is reform.)

Now for a quick chat.

“Give some kind of school memory in about five lines.”

“It’s not much of a story, but you know those small water intakes on the walls of pools? During our summer pool classes in elementary school, people were saying sticking your dick in one made you a hero, so I actually did it.”

“Are you here to troll my afterword?”

“Anyway, it turned out it was too easy, so the rule was changed to sticking it in all the holes. I had no choice, so I did so during our free time in the pool.”

“Why do you sound so proud of that fact?”

“Later, my teacher asked me why I did it. I didn’t really know, so I said, ‘Eh? You don’t know either?’ He told me to stop joking around, but I wonder what he was going to do if I’d been serious?”

He would probably have abandoned all responsibility. Anyway, the story reaches the mainland next time.

“Who was the greediest of all?”

I’ll leave you with that. The BGM was Takahashi Yukihiro’s Suteki na Hito. (Nakamori Akina’s Ophelia is a good choice too, but it’s the song I used while thinking up the plot.) I think it would work best as an ending theme.

Next up is the Musashi’s repairs at IZUMO, so look forward to that.

April 2009. A morning of persistent pollen.

-Kawakami Minoru

